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ARANYA

HYDERABAD BIRDING PALS | FRIENDS OF FLORA & FAUNA

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Hyderabad Birding Pals

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HBP Birdwalks

In this issue

In the December edition of Aranya we cover the 4 bird walks conducted in the last month of 2017. A significant sighting from these walks were; the Common Starling aka European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). The first record on ebird for Telangana state.

In this edition we also cover,

- HBP's opportunity to interact with young minds; the students of Sloka school.
- What's in my camera bag?...features Masood Hussain, an accomplished bird and wildlife photographer from Hyderabad.
- Phani Krishna Ravi reviews the use of camera rain covers for outdoor photography.
- A trip report from Mandal & Chopta by Husein Latif and other sections like Photographers Corner, Notable Sightings and the skill of birdwatching on wheels by Abhishek Ravindra.

We are delighted that we had many new members joining our bird walks in December and we hope that they'll join us later this year in 2018 as well.

Happy Birding

- Ajinkya Supekar

Hyderabad Birding Pals is a group of bird watching enthusiasts based out of Hyderabad, united by a common love for birds. We organize free bird walks around the city of Hyderabad that are open to participation by all like-minded individuals. We are an informal group, who are passionate about bird watching and photography, learning about bird behavior (in the field) and doing our bit towards conservation of nature and its habitat as well. Do check our Facebook group to stay up to date on our bird watching events.

ARANYA

CONTENTS

Page

HBP bird walks in December 04

Close encounter with a Montagu’s Harrier 15

What's in my Camera Bag 17

Rain Cover for Wildlife Photographers 23

A New year’s greeting from the Black Baza 24

Trip report from Mandal and Chopta 26

Notable Telangana Sightings by HBP in 2017 33

Notable Sightings 34

Photographer’s Corner 42

HBP at Sloka School Bazaar 13

Birding on Wheels 30

December Bird Walks

180th Bird Walk | UmaMaheshwaram

3rd December 2017

181st Bird Walk | Himayat Sagar

17th December 2017

182nd Bird Walk | Narsapur Forest

24th December 2017

183rd Bird Walk | Ananthagiri Hills

31th December 2017

Uma Maheshwaram Trip report

By Shreeniwas Kandukuree

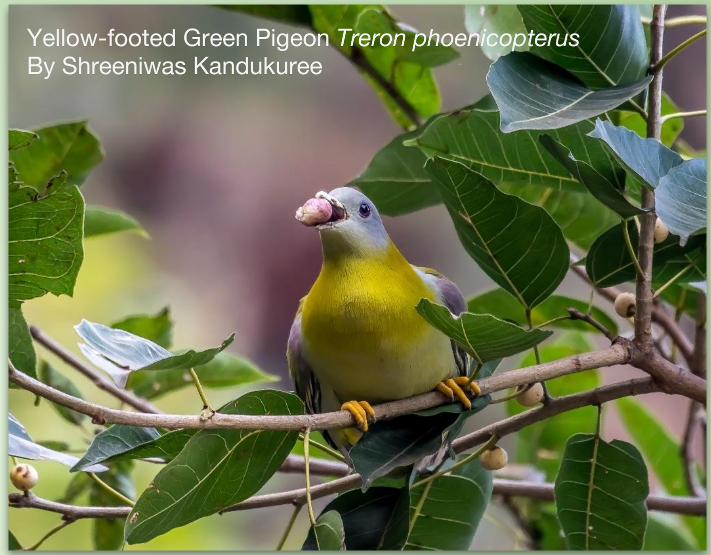
180th Bird Walk at Uma Maheshwaram
Sunday, 3rd December, 2017

While I have made several self driven birding trips to places within city limits, this was the first time that I joined the HBP team for their 180th Bird walk at Uma Maheshwaram. It was an experience I enjoyed, being in the company of like minded people who shared my enthusiasm of birding.

Umamaheshwaram is the northern gateway to Srisailam and is one of the jyotirlingas. It is mentioned in the Vedas that a visit to Srisailam without visiting Umamaheswaram is incomplete. The Umamaheshwaram temple is atop a hill and covered by a canopy of huge trees. The hill ranges and tree cover shield the temple and 500 metres of the stretch towards PapaNasam. Through the day, hardly any sunlight penetrates the tree cover on this stretch, thus maintaining a much cooler temperature than the surrounding areas all year round. It is also popularly known as the Poor Man's Ooty.

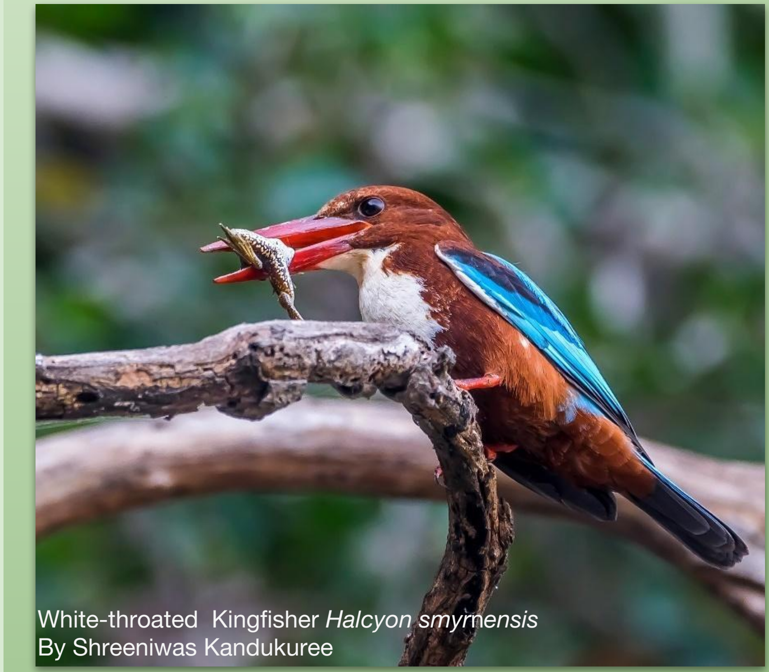
On arrival and at a first glance, the picturesque view with thick green canopies with lots of chirping and bird calls held promise of a good birding session at this place. I called one of the HBP team members who guided me to their location, and here began my birding expedition with the HBP team.

Yellow Footed Green Pigeon was a first time sighting for me. I was able to capture few photographs in low light conditions.



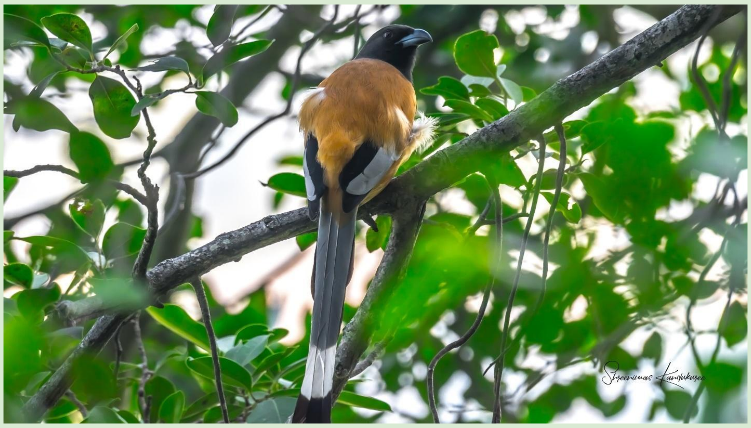
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus*
By Shreeniwas Kandukuree

Later to my surprise we sighted a flock of 15 birds. We encountered a **White Throated Kingfisher** a few times and were lucky to have seen it with a Frog catch.



White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
By Shreeniwas Kandukuree

Within 5 mins, we found a Yellow Throated Bulbul. A Good Day to start is a Good Day to Remember. **Rufous Treepie** this was the first time I have photographed the bird and was excited to see it.



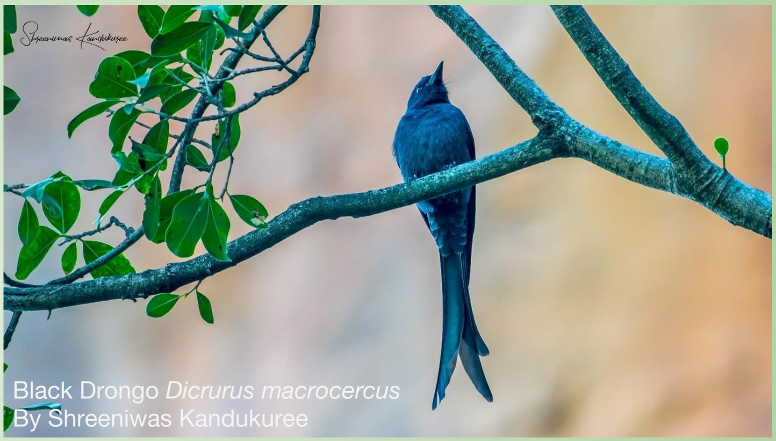
Rufous Treepie, *Dendrocitta vagabunda*
By Shreeniwas Kandukuree

Then I sighted a **Black Drongo.**

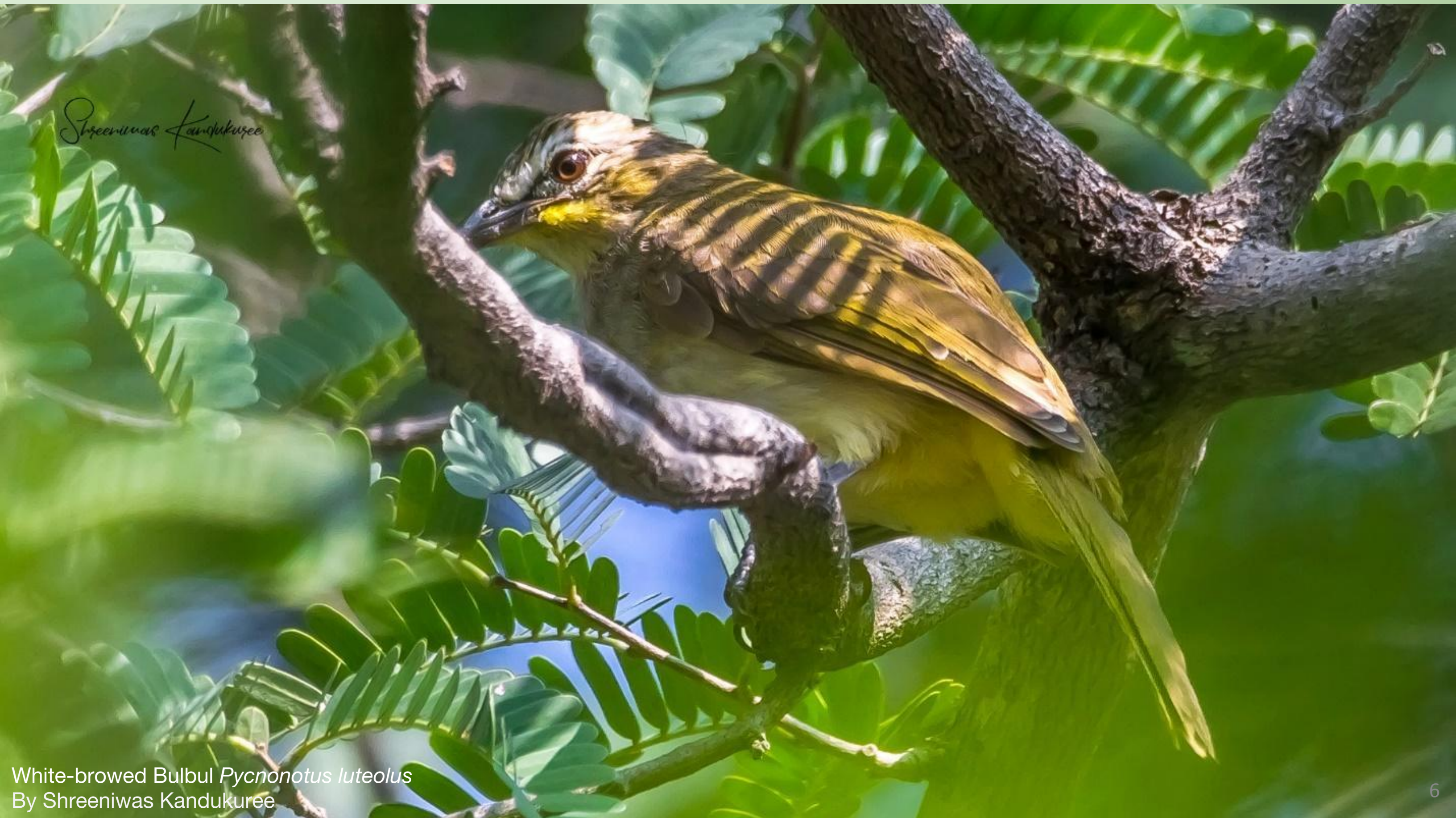
Later, we headed to Rasul Cheruvu which is about 30-40 mins drive leading to the rear entrance that is on the edge of the Nallamalla Forest.

The road was bad and some of us had to get out of the cars to guide and navigate the vehicles through the humongous potholes on this stretch. On a lighter note, One among the group said If we can drive well on this road, we can drive anywhere in the world”. On the way and back, had a sighting of Pied Bushchat, Ashy Crowned Sparrow Lark, Rosy Starling, Red vented bulbul, and Indian Robin

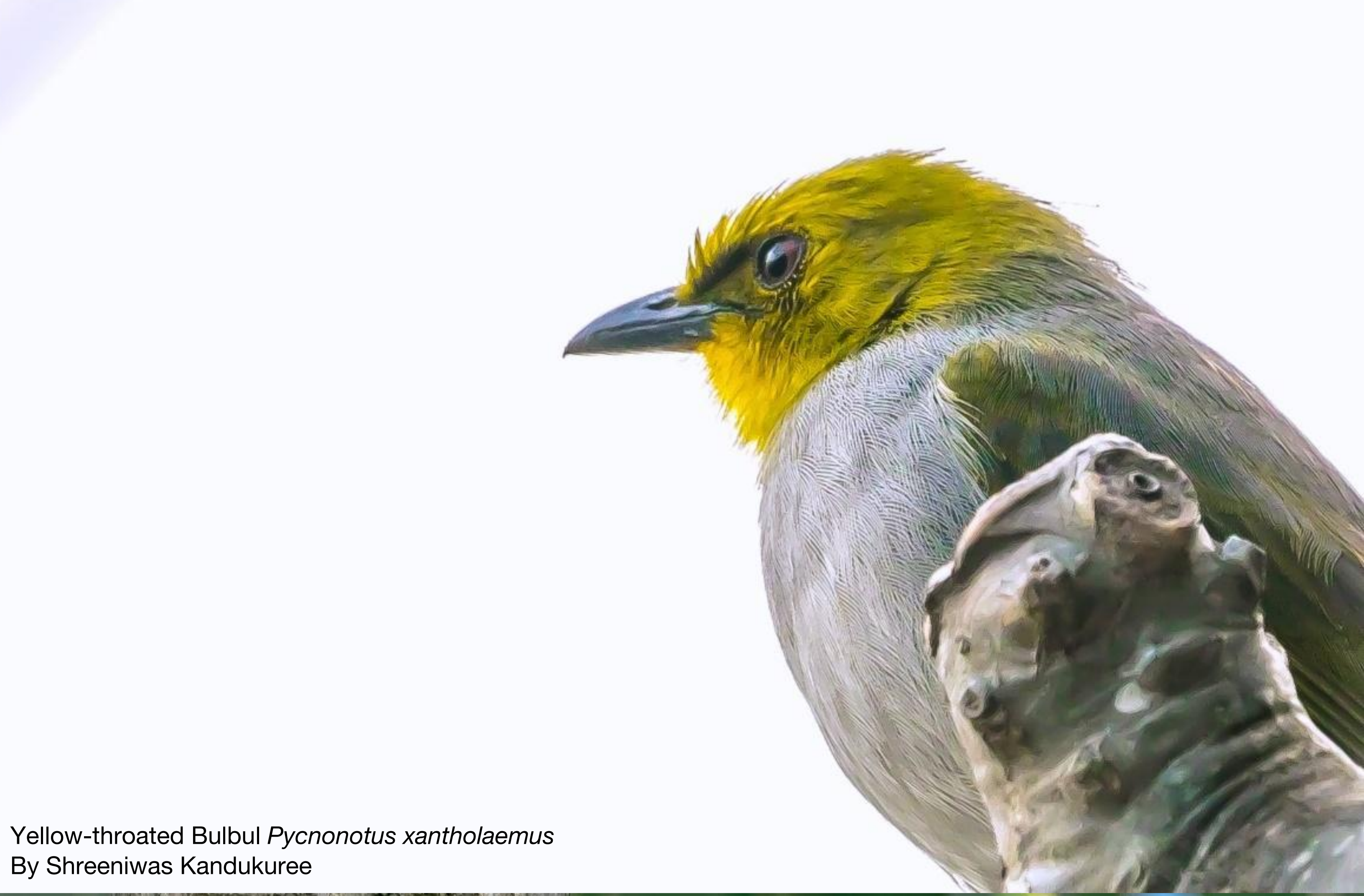
Felt very happy to have spent a memorable day with the HBP team amidst lots of learning, excitement, and memories, and to top it all; **Improved Patience**!



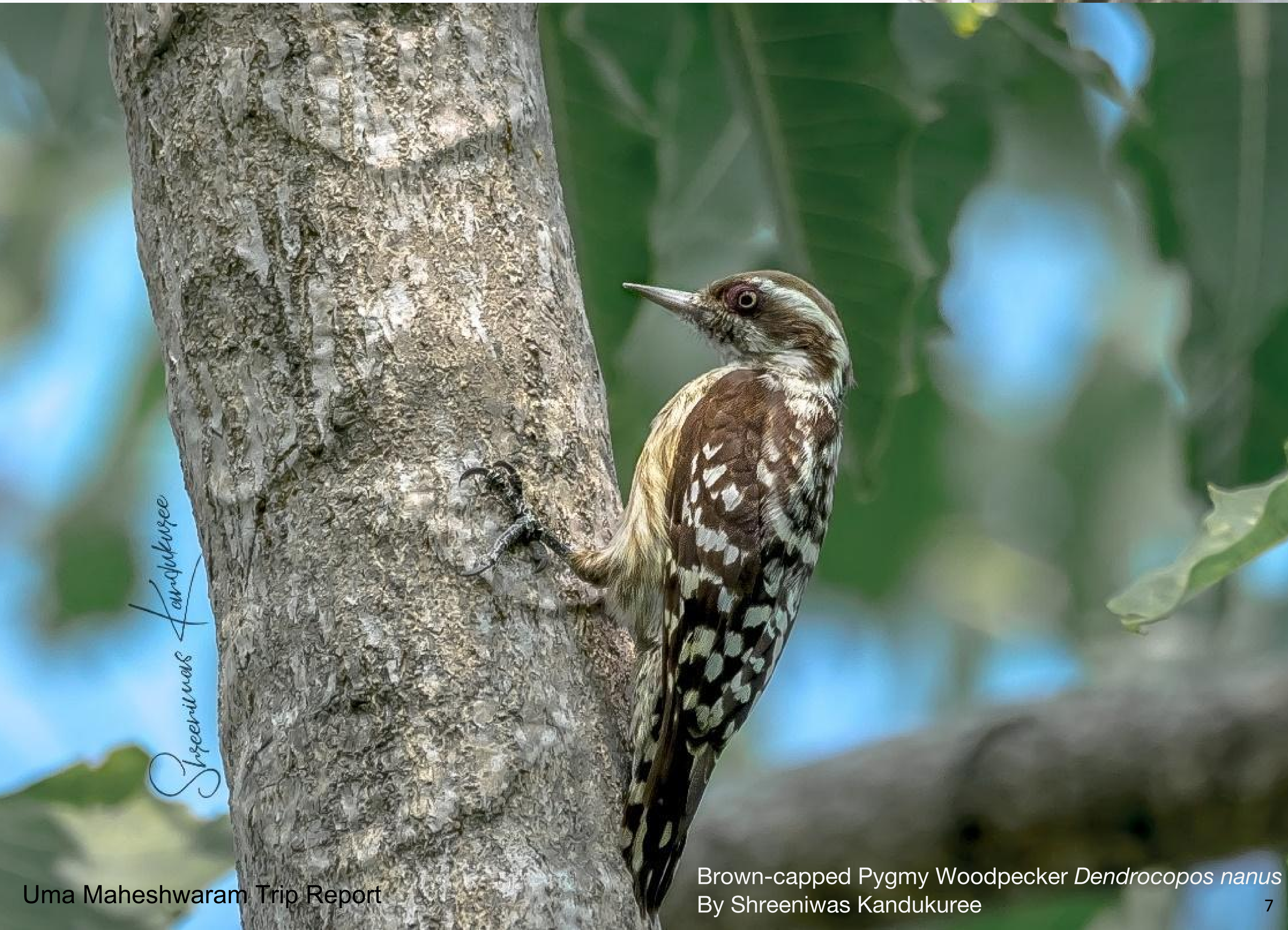
Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*
By Shreeniwas Kandukuree



White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus*
By Shreeniwas Kandukuree



Yellow-throated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus*
By Shreeniwas Kandukuree



Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos nanus*
By Shreeniwas Kandukuree

Himayat Sagar Trip report

By Mangesh Singh Thakur

181st Birdwalk at Himayat Sagar
17th December 2017

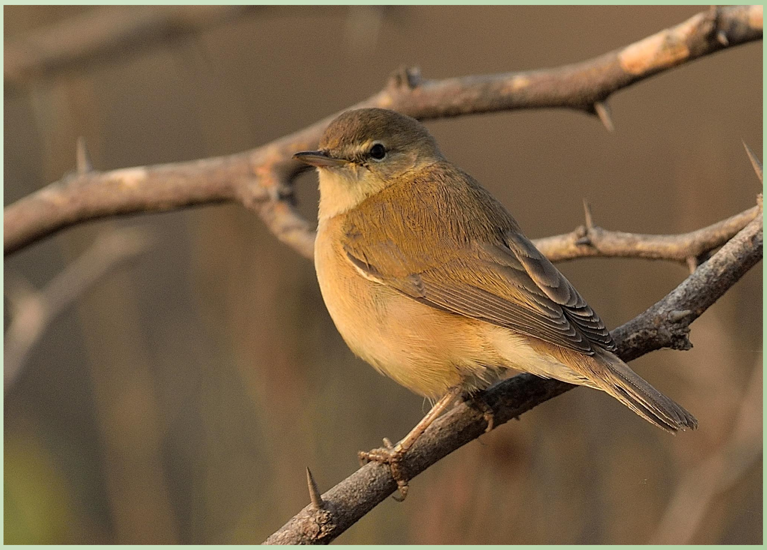
After living for 10 years in Mumbai, when I came to know that I was going to relocate to Hyderabad as a part of my job, the first thing I did was to check for a good birding group in Hyderabad. The group which was suggested by everyone I knew was "Hyderabad Birding Pals" aka HBP. I joined this group immediately and started to post my photos to become familiar with members and the group.

Initially when I came to Hyderabad for almost 3 months, I couldn't start my birding trips due to work and other priorities. On 16-Dec, I saw that a Bird Walk had been arranged at Himayat Sagar by HBP and on 17-Dec Morning I decided to join it. Being new to the group and the location, I asked if I could get a ride with someone. I immediately got a response from Raju sir. A very humble person, new to birding and equally excited as me.

I and Raju Sir started our journey towards a meeting point near Appa Junction. After some 30-40 minutes, we reached there. It was still dark and a typical winter morning. At Appa Junction I met with some core HBP members like Phani, Balaji, Kalyan, Bharat etc. After a cup of tea, we all headed towards 'Himayat Sagar'.

When we reached the location, the sun was yet to make a full appearance and the light was not that great.

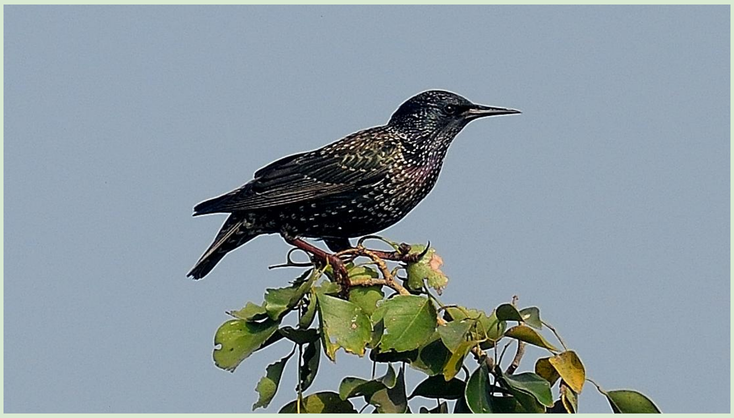
We parked our cars near a farm, nearby was a long stretch of land, a home to many avian beauties. As we moved ahead, to our right, there was some cultivated land, with some boundary walls. to our left, there was a belt of green followed by a small waterbody that extended till the main lake. Between this was a large rectangular patch of sand and soil, covered with bushes dotted here and there.



Blyth's Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
By Mangesh Singh Thakur

We started our trek by checking for birds along the water body. As expected, due to low light and the cold, the bird activity was not that great. We still found flocks of River Terns, Barns swallows welcoming us from the high sky. There were a group of Cormorants on the opposite side of the water body, getting ready for their sun-bath. Sudden flights of some snipe and chirping calls of unidentified warblers came from all directions.

Moving ahead, we saw more birds like bluethroat, common kingfisher, common coots, little grebe, purple heron etc. As we moved further ahead, the undergrowth became thick and somewhere I lost track of members who were ahead of me. I spent some time at the edge of waterbody, observing sunbirds, whitethroat, warblers etc. there were good activity of bee eaters, white browed bulbul on the farm side. I decided to go back to the place where I had seen more activity.



Common Starling, *Stumus vulgaris*
By Mangesh Singh Thakur

I saw a Spotted owlet coming out of green thicket of tree that gave me some photographic opportunities. While I was busy photographing the owlet, I saw a bird among the high branches. it was a Jungle prinia and a lifer for me. I followed it on the ground and finally got a decent pic. Soon I was joined by Bharat and Raju Sir. We spotted birds like brown shrike, baya weavers, indian bushlark, booted warbler, ashy-crowned sparrow lark, tawny pipit, Green sandpiper. Some of those birds were lifers for Bharat sir and I could see the satisfaction on his face. Raju sir, a first time joiner was enjoying himself equally.

Around 9.30 am with the sun getting brighter, we were randomly checking places to find some birds. In the meantime other team members who went a bit further inside the undergrowth had some amazing sightings of Grey Francolins, Painted francolins, Quails etc.

While we were almost done with our birding and waiting for other members to come back. I was satisfied getting the jungle prinia as a lifer but that wasn't the end.

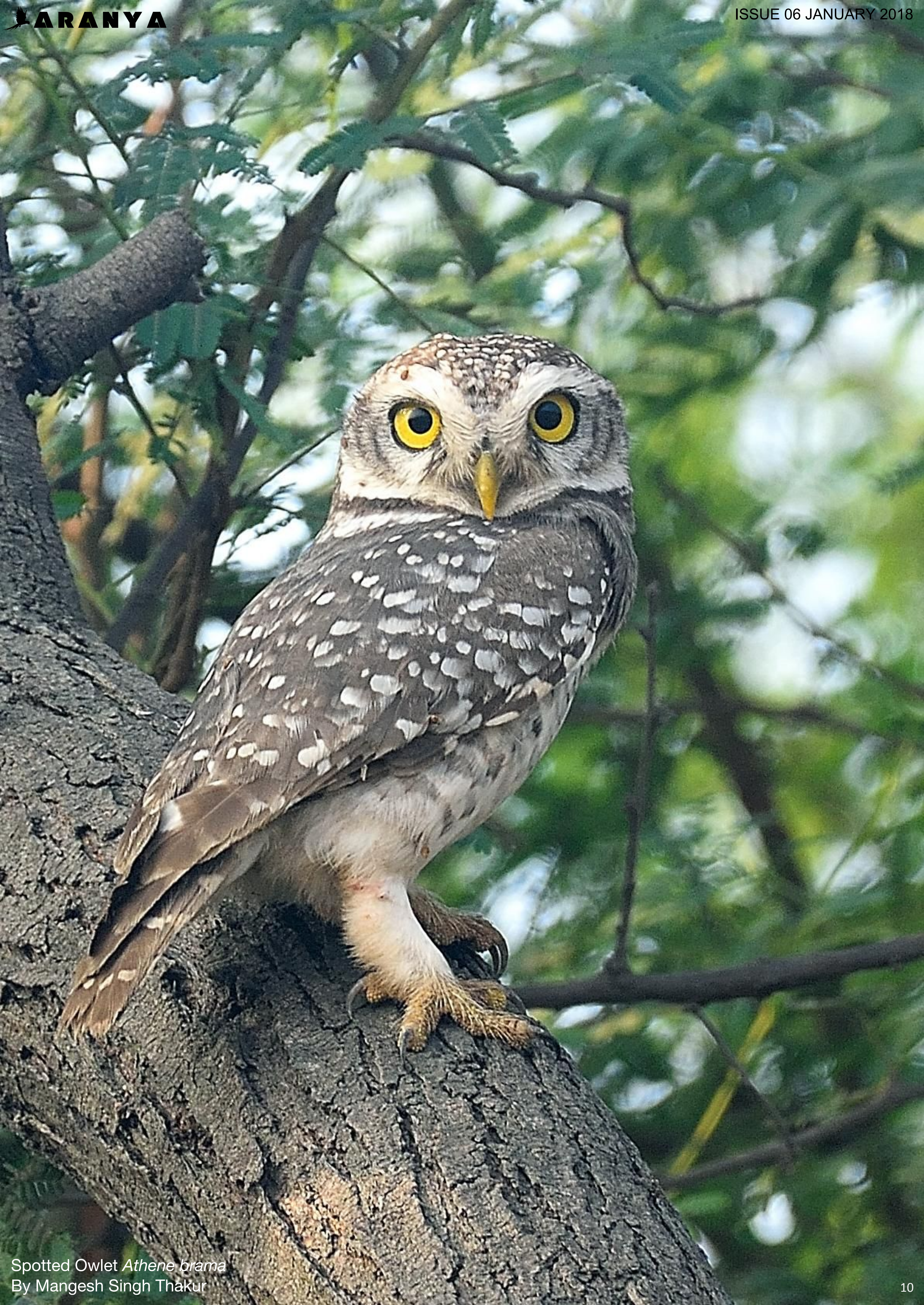
As someone rightly said, Nature has no boundaries and no rules... “Anything can happen, at anytime”. I was shooting sunbirds perched on low level bushes, when a bird, the size of a starling came flying from nowhere and perched on top of tree in front of us. A bird with a dark,shiny, spotty look.The only name came in mind is "Common Starling" or "European Starling".

A bird which is found mainly in Gujarat, Rajasthan and north of India. It was a complete surprise to us. It perched for good 2-3 mins on top of a tree. Allowing us to take some decent record shots and then it flew away, leaving all of us stunned by its presence.

It was a first ever photographic record of the Common starling from Telangana. Everyone was equally happy and excited about the sighting. Before leaving Himayat Sagar, we all enjoyed some Gujarati snacks bought by Bharat, followed by some chocolates and in conclusion a group photograph with some good memories to cherish.

Himayat Sagar is a good birding site and a major source of drinking water for city. It is our responsibility to keep it clean for both humans and other living creatures.

Well, this was just the beginning and my first experience with Team HBP, there will hopefully be many more such trips to come in the future. I want to conclude this write up with a Big thank you to HBP and I feel blessed to be a part of this wonderful group.



Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*
By Mangesh Singh Thakur

ISSUE 06 JANUARY 2018

Narsapur Forest Trip report

By Bhaarat Vyas

182nd Bird Walk at Narsapur Forest
24th December 2017

The meeting time at the Air Force Academy Dundigul was 06:30 hrs. As we had our morning tea at the tea stall outside the academy, Phani briefed us on the sightings of the Eagle-Owl enroute to Dundigal. We then headed toward the Narsapur forest area, to kick off the #HBP182 bird walk.

Narsapur is a census town in Medak district of the Indian State of Telangana and is located in the Narsapur Mandal. The Narsapur forest is 47.5 KM north from Hyderabad in Medak district, spread between Gummadidala and Narsapur towns. This forest spans over 30 sq. km and has a mini-ghat section, thick forest, a hill, a large lake, a good number of birds, butterflies, varied flora & fauna. Beware of stepping out on the road, there monkeys everywhere. You will find hundreds of monkeys throughout the road, especially during breakfast time which we experienced too.

Small Minivet, *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
By Bhaarat Vyas

As always Phani briefed the group regarding the sighting of many types of flycatchers, waders, raptors and other species in the area. Post a brief guidance on do's & don'ts we grouped ourselves into teams and set off in different directions.

During the bird walk we began our sightings with a number of Coppersmith barbets, Plum headed parakeets, Oriental white-eyes, White–eyed bulbul, White-browed fantails, Small minivets, a Chestnut-shouldered petronia or Yellow–throated sparrow and the eye-catching Strawberry finch. We got the Rufous Treepie and had a brief sighting of the Verditer Flycatcher. A lifer for us was a Greater Spotted Eagle. We were really excited on seeing and being able to capture images of most if not all these species. *"Phani's statement – R.K. Balaji is the lucky charm for me, as we always get some new species*".

On concluding the walk the group met to share sighting details, bird behaviours observed and a promise to meet again. A total 134 species were sighted on the day with some rare species such as a **Malabar Whistling Thrush** spotted by Mangesh Singh Thakur and photographed by Srinivas Kolla.

Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera*
By RK Balaji

This trip report cannot be concluded without saying – "***Relationships are like birds. If you hold tightly they will die. If you hold loosely they will fly. But if you hold with care, they remain with us forever".***

So stay connected., Save birds, Happy Pongal & Happy Makarsankranti to all the HBP members and readers of this write-up.

Proud Member of Team HBP - Bhaarat Vyas

Ananthagiri Hills Trip report

By Sharabh Kaushal

183rd Bird Walk at Ananthagiri Hills
Sunday, 31st December, 2017

HBP's 183rd bird walk was my first with HBP along with a couple of my friends who joined for the first time too. The trip started at 7:00 AM with a group photograph and we moved towards the lush green forest area at Ananthagiri. A couple of members leading the way spotted a **Brown Fish Owl**. This was enough to boost the enthusiasm of many of us, at least mine for sure. While the rest of us were looking for the owl, nowhere to be seen by then, an Ashy Drongo caught up our attention. We decided to move further forming two groups.

Brown Fish Owl, Ketupa Zeylonensis
By Manjoy Lourembam

MANJOY LOUREMBAM
PHOTOGRAPHY

Our group moved towards the grassland and the very first bird that we spotted was a beautiful Indian Paradise Flycatcher (female), a lifer for a few of us. We took a long walk in the grassland and sat there for a while, enjoying the serenity. The only voices to be heard of were or were birds' calls and their songs. We spotted a good number of Bay-backed Shrikes and Red-vented Bulbuls there, a couple of Eurasian Collared Doves, Red-rumped Swallows and a Lesser Whitethroat.

We moved back taking a different route through the woods. Quite a good number of Rose-ringed Parakeets to be spotted there and of course as they like to make their presence known with their loud calls. The metronomic call of the Coppersmith Barbet still stood out as it was enjoying the view from a tree top.

Orange-headed Thrush, Zoothera citrina

We continued and reached back in denser area of the forest, comparatively cooler; and as we were informed by other fellow members, a good spot for various flycatchers' sightings. We spotted the noisy Jungle Babblers followed by White Spotted Fantails, Tickell's Blue Flycatchers, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Green and Greenish Warblers, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, **Orange-headed Thrush** and many others. We decided to spend some more time around the same area and ended up with awesome sightings of many more Asian Paradise Flycatchers (rufous and white males, females). Couldn't be a better last birding expedition of the year.

HBP at the Sloka School Bazaar

By Ajinkya Supekar

Hyderabad Birding Pals had a special event on the morning of 10th December 2017. Instead of the usual Sunday bird walk, a team of us went to meet the children of Sloka school near Chilkur, Hyderabad. It was their Annual bazaar, where the parents of children had set up stalls in the school premises ranging from food and merchandise to stalls catering to a social cause. We set up our stall with bird photographs, posters and equipment required for bird watching. Our motive was to reach out to, and educate children as well as parents to take up bird watching as a hobby.

Team HBP at the stall

As we had bird photographs that had been printed for a previous exhibition, these were put up on the walls. Poster infographics of a beginners guide to bird-watching were on display. These infographics had details on what to carry, what to wear and how the children could contribute to bird watching. Binoculars and a Camera kit were on display for all to know about them and educate the more curious ones.

Postcard sized images of birds were used to distribute amongst the children as prizes for completing the Bird Bingo game we played and also to give these to the students as souvenirs.

Distributing prizes to winners of bird bingo game

In the Bird Bingo game a participant had to complete four simple tasks in a row that included hearing a bird's call, seeing a bird on a branch and finding a place where bird can hide. This was played around the stall which had many trees. Through this game children were introduced to the initial basic steps to watching birds in a fun way. Of course, their wish to get a bird photograph as a prize on completion motivated them even more. While playing this game there were moments when children asked questions like How can you see the bird but I can't? Where to find them? and How to find them? Most heard the bird's call and took sometime to find the bird. When they were told to find the source of the call to spot the bird, it became easy. After some effort most completed the game and won prizes. There were even kids who wanted to play it again with their friends.

It was good to meet parents some of whom were already members of HBP, telling us that they'll soon join the bird walks. Parents wanted to know if their family can be brought to the walks, how far and frequently we go and how they can get to know of an event. A few of them wanted to know about which binoculars to use and what camera gear to buy. The exhibited images and posters generated a lot of curiosity and wonder and were genuinely appreciated. We were glad to tell them which birds are seen around Hyderabad and the names of the birds on display.

We ourselves thoroughly enjoyed this event and were happy to pass the message of birdwatching to the kids at Shloka. HBP looks forward to getting more such opportunities to organize events, that leave a lasting impression on young and curious minds apart from us having a wonderful time with children.

We extend our thanks to HBP member, Vasisht Satwalekar who asked us to put up the stall and Tejdeep Kaur Menon for her support. Without the contributions and efforts of Harikrishna Adepu this event would not have been successful. Special thanks to Manjula Desai, Naresh Vadrevu, Robin Panigrahi and Rajeev Khandelwal for their inputs and presence. Thanks to Komal Agrawal for allowing us to use her "A beginner's guide to bird watching" infographic.

HBP at sloka school bazaar

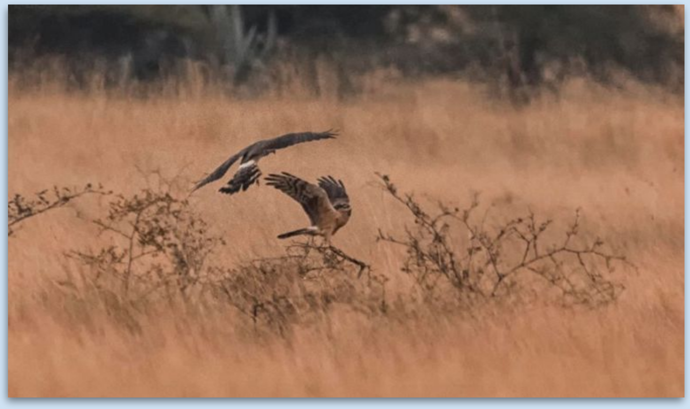
Close encounter with Montagu's Harrier

By Soumyajit Basu

This was my second visit to the grasslands of Southern India – Rollapadu. Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh, and is like the prairies of the United States, or as many say it gives you a feel of being at the Masai Mara in South India.

It was a tiring but good day spotting Blackbucks and different species of birds all day long, we were happy to have spotted the extremely shy Indian Fox aka Bengal fox twice. As it was already 30 minutes past 4pm we headed towards the Raptor Zone or as it is called the Harrier Zone.

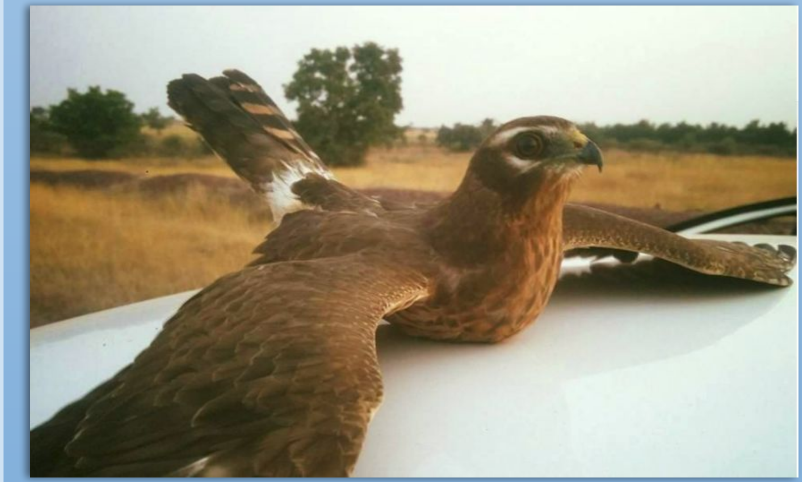
We did not see much activity in the first 15-20 minutes and being winter we were conscious of the light dropping early. Some of us were amazed by the sunset among the golden grasslands and switched over to wide angle lenses to capture the landscape of golden fields, lit by the golden sunlight that made an amazing foreground to a setting sun. I however had made up my mind not to switch lenses, as I saw a raptor sitting pretty far away on a rock and I wanted to capture that shot.



I headed towards it through the long grasses until I reached a distance from where a decent record shot could be captured. I was not only successful but lucky too, as the male Montagu's harrier came and tried to dominate the female sitting on the perch (rock) as seen in the picture.

Lucky to get this shot and some more, I was happy and started heading back to where the cars were parked. As I was heading back the place suddenly came alive with a lot of Harrier activity, we also spotted a Greater Spotted Eagle flying overhead. There were at least 8-10 Harriers flying at close proximity, but because of the poor light as the sun had already set, it was hard to take any more shots. As we started to drive back to leave the guide to the Reserve Office we spotted a fight in the Sky.

It was a Greater spotted Eagle chasing a Montagu, it came down from the top and hit the Montagu and flew away, and we saw the Montagu coming down. As we kept moving ahead we suddenly spotted something on the ground unable to move. Our first guess was a Quail or a Francolin. I quickly got down from the car and to my surprise it was a female Montagu's Harrier (Juvenile) which was on the ground and trying to crawl with its wings wide open. I watched it for a few seconds and picked it up from the ground carefully and caressed it a few times, opening my hands so that it would fly away. But something seemed to be wrong. On checking for any injury or blood there wasn't anything. It wasn't ready to fly or was unable to fly. We then asked the guide to take it to the forest officer, as on checking the bird it seemed that there were no injuries to the wing but her talon was closed as if it was in shock or afraid. We gave it a last try and left her on the hood of the car for her to fly away, but she was unable to do so. Finally we had the Forest guide hold her and gave it some water. After a little rest she came out of the shock of being hit from above by a much bigger raptor and was able to stand up. We went to the side of the grasslands, released her and waited a few moments as we saw she was moving and active again. Within a few minutes she was able to fly away, back into the lap of Mother Nature where she belonged.



What's in My Camera Bag?

Masood Hussain

I am an electrical engineer by qualification and in the business of designing and manufacture of earthing and lightning protection system. Although I learnt the basics of photography from my grandfather during the film era, I had literally given up photography until I bought my first DSLR a Nikon D90 in 2009. Having learnt the basics of photography on a film camera, it was very difficult for me to adapt to a DSLR. I didn't even know the functions of those various buttons on my Nikon D90. I realized the need to learn how exactly DSLRs worked and how to make the best out of my camera. I was lucky enough to find a great mentor Mr. Ashok Kandimalla who taught me the basics digital photography.

Even today, If I have any doubts related to photography, I approach him for help and I'm thankful to him for always being there for me.

How it started...

Like every other beginner I used to shoot anything and everything around me. Very soon it started getting monotonous and boring. I wanted to do something different and something difficult. That is when bird photography got into my head. Small size, extreme sensitivity to human presence and their quick movements make birds, the most difficult subject to photograph. To start off with a low investment, the first lens I purchased for bird photography was a Nikkor 70-300 ED VR. Seeing the initial images I shot with this lens started to feel that a focal length of 300mm was just not enough to get quality bird shots. I remember the day when I went back to Mr Ashok to discuss this issue. His explanation totally changed my entire thought process. He simply said that the thirst for focal length is never ending and there will be situations where even 600mm would not suffice. He advised me to continue shooting with the same lens and put in more effort to get close to the subjects without disturbing them, his valuable advice went a long way in my progress as a bird photographer. I started enjoying the process of planning the shot, the process of approaching the bird without making it aware of my presence. I started to get quality images with a just a 300mm focal length. A couple of years later I upgraded to a Nikon D300s and a Sigma 150-500mm things became a lot more easier for me. I have used this combo for almost 5 years and have squeezed every bit I could out of it. I have recently further upgraded my gear to a Nikon D500 and a Nikkor 200-500mm.

Style of photography

My favourite theme is “Birds in action”. Starting of with taking quality images of perched birds I slowly started putting in efforts to click birds in action. Images that depict their typical behaviour. Images of birds in flight, landing, taking off, hunting etc… I love clicking images of raptors as I find them extremely majestic. For me a photograph should be a story in itself. It is about capturing those scintillating moments in the wild that stand the test of time. For me it’s not about how much rare a species of bird I shot, it is about how beautifully I can portray a common bird. Even when it comes to wildlife other than birds, a spotted deer or even a langur is as interesting a subject to me as a tiger or a leopard.

Achievements

1) Distinction (AFIAP) from the International federation of photographic art, France.
2) Winner of the best bird photographer during Cop11 held by the United Nations in Hyderabad.
3) First runners up at the Natural Capital Awards 2017
4) My images have been published as cover shots and as a part of articles in various photography magazines.

In My Bag...

Nikon D500

I upgraded to this camera from a Nikon D300s which was the Nikon DX format flagship for many years. So every aspect of Nikon D500 was a big leap in terms of technological advancement. The shooting speed went up from 8 fps to 10 fps, resolution from 12.5 to 21.5 and most importantly the high ISO performance improved considerably. Apart from these improvements, a new feature which I loved the most was the swivel touch screen focus and click. One can focus by touching the target focus point on the screen. The camera locks focus and takes a shot the moment you lift your finger from the screen. This feature goes a long way in helping to get low angle shots.

Nikkor 200-500mm

A lovely lens for both birds and mammals. Gives you the entire range of focal length to close in on the subject and to zoom out to include habitat. It is considerably sharp throughout its range of focal length. It locks focus quite quickly and accurately. Absolute value for money at the price its present price point.

Nikkor 105mm f2.8

I use this for all my macro shots. This lens has been dominating this segment for a long time now and has proven its capabilities consistently.

Support systems

With the so much improvement of high ISO performance, I prefer increasing the ISO to achieve higher shutter speed than to attach a tripod or monopod to shoot at low shutter speed. I almost always shoot handheld.

Suggestions

- Get as close as possible without disturbing your subject. No focal length can match your physical proximity to the subject.

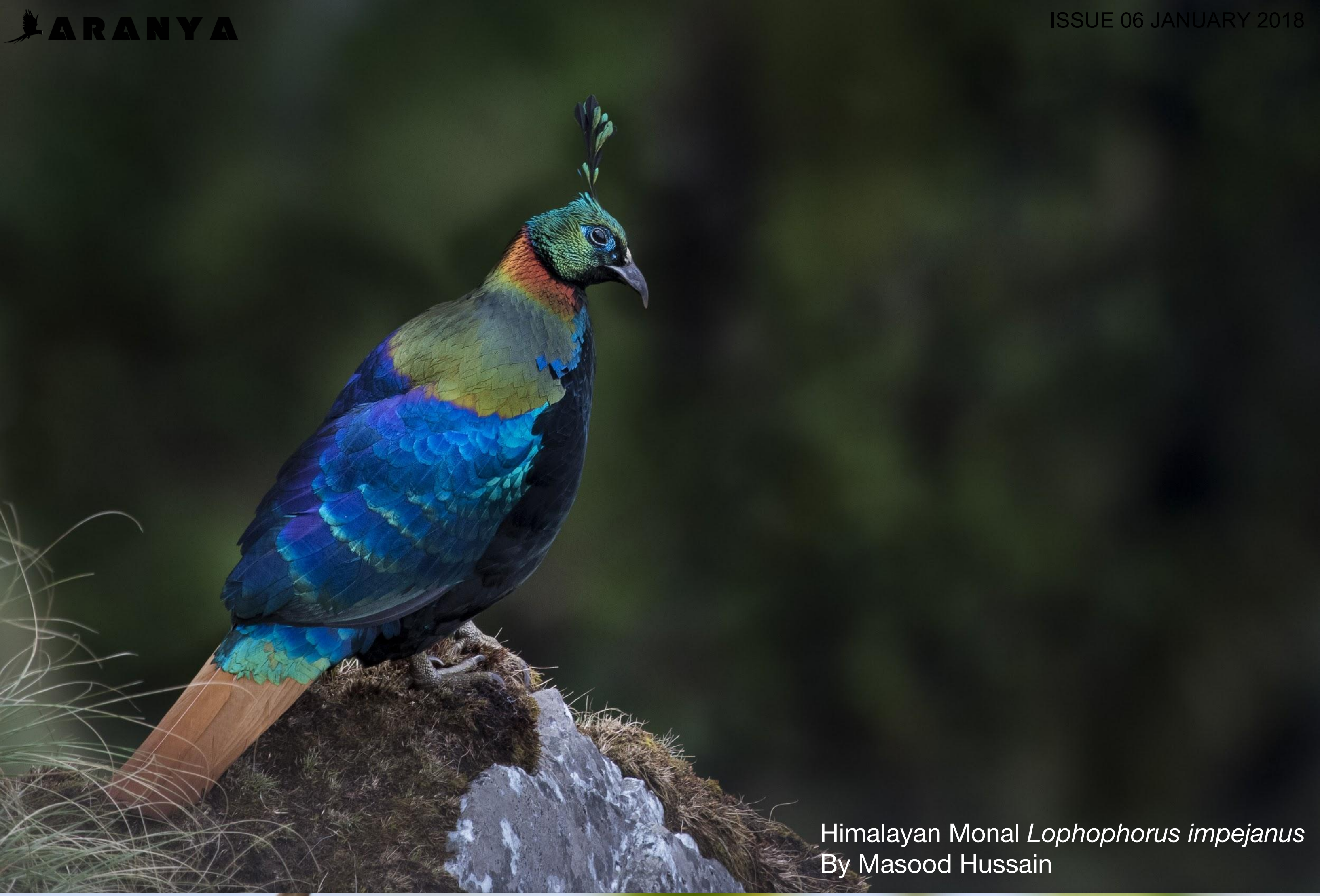
- Approach the bird in such a way that you get the best possible background. Also try to position yourself in such a way that there is a little clutter as possible around the subject. Remember, changing the angle of your camera or moving a few steps to your right or left can actually have a great impact on the background.

- Every lens has a sweet point i.e an aperture where it is sharpest. It is usually a couple of steps down the maximum aperture of your lens. So if the maximum aperture of your lens is f5.6 then try to use f7.1 of f8.

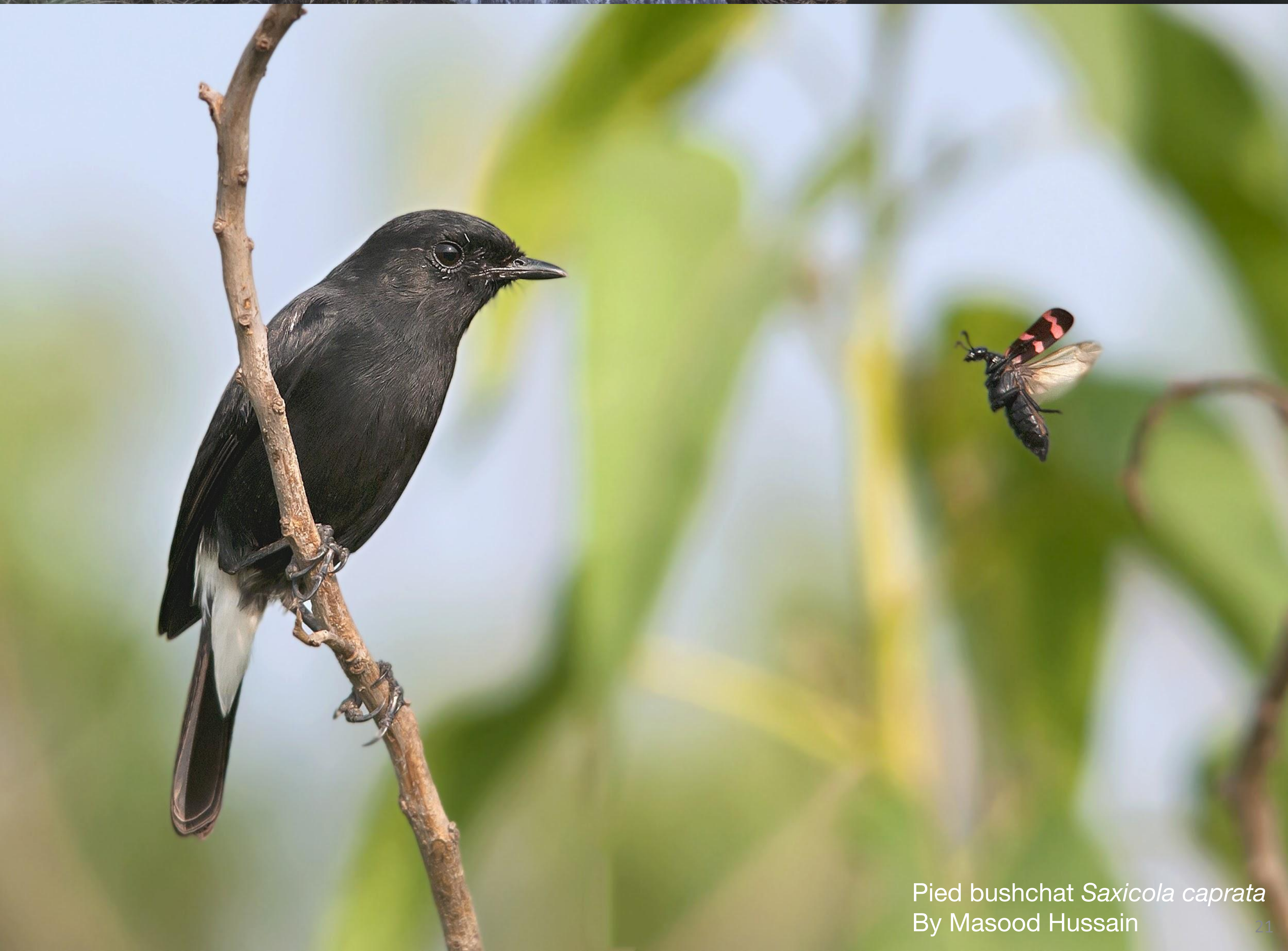
- Avoid shooting at the highest focal length. The sharpness of zoom lenses deteriorates at the higher end. So if you are using a 200-500mm, try not to go beyond 480mm. Similarly if you have a 150-600mm lens try to not to go beyond 550mm.

Final comments

Everything boils down to one simple fact that it is the photographer who makes the image. The camera is merely a tool. There is no shortcut to success. Patience and perseverance is the key to quality photography. No matter how expensive or high end gear you use, If you can't make a frame in your mind you cannot click a good picture. Learn to see things differently. Ansel Adams once said, " the lens can see both ways, the subject in the from and the soul of the photographer behind it".



Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*
By Masood Hussain



Pied bushchat *Saxicola caprata*
By Masood Hussain

White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
By Masood Hussain

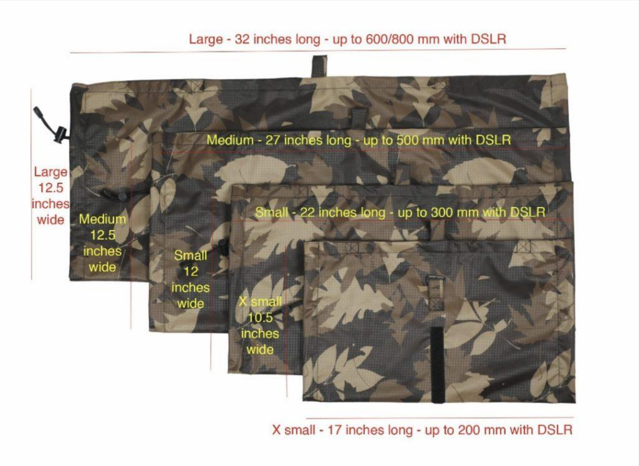
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
By Masood Hussain

Rain Covers for Wildlife Photographers

By Phani Krishna Ravi

Rain covers are not only for protecting your precious camera gear from rain but also from all elements of nature including dust, sand, fog, water etc. Rain covers come in various sizes, one should always consider buying it for the longest lens in the kit, they also come in various patterns that blend with Green forests for bird watching etc.

Recently we have a lot of Indian manufacturers supplying various rain covers that are way more affordable than the imported ones. I have come across this one from Wulfpro (www.Wulfpro.com) which I found to be the cheapest and it comes with a carrying pouch for easy transport.


Large - 32 inches long - up to 600/800 mm with DSLR
Medium - 27 inches long - up to 500 mm with DSLR
Large 12.5 inches wide
Medium 12.5 inches wide
Small - 22 inches long - up to 300 mm with DSLR
Small 12 inches wide
X small 10.5 inches wide
X small - 17 inches long - up to 200 mm with DSLR

The Wulfpro rain cover is basic, very lightweight and comes in 3 textures with good quality velcro. They come in different sizes which will fit with your camera kit lens to 600F4/800 F5.6 Canon/Nikon also protecting the camera attached to it and they cost under a 1000/- rupees.

I have used this rain cover during the heavy monsoon season in Telangana at Ananthagiri, Narsapur, UmaMaheshwaram and also during my recent trip to Chopta in Uttarakhand. The rain cover is always on my Canon 600F4 lens due to its very lightweight material used and can be carried with your gear always without any hassle. Even while storage of the lens back home I keep the rain cover on always to avoid any spills of liquids which IMO makes it a must buy accessory for all wildlife photographers at very fraction of the cost of their gear.

Below I have mentioned few more Indian manufacturers offering the similar rain covers.

PROS: Very Lightweight, good quality and comes in 3 different textures with a handy carrying pouch.

CONS: The material used can be better.

http://www.wulfpro.com
http://www.wildroar.in
https://www.naturelounge.in
http://camoline.in

A New Year's Greeting from Black Baza

By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Trees with immense height and girth, mysterious cloud engulfing the mountain peaks, the dancing of light through the woods, the chirping of the birds in the lap of one of the top most birding hotspots in the world- The Western Ghats. It is a repository of rare, endemic and endangered flora and fauna. Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary (10.1294597 N, 76.6871945 E), Thattekad, the first bird Sanctuary in Kerala, and Periyar National Park (9.5909132 N,77.1752434 E), Thekkady are the heaven for birdwatchers in Kerala.

Visiting Kerala for bird watching had been on my to do list for a long time, and finally I got a chance to visit in December. I arranged accommodation in Jungle Bird Homestay where I was blessed to spend time in birding with two enthusiastic bird lovers having decades of experience in birding: Mr Gireesh Chandran and his mother. As soon I reached, I showed my wish list to my guide. And it was Black Baza leading my wish list. He suggested me two options, first to visit a trail named as 'Black Baza' trail where finding a black baza is most likely but you have to pay for it, and second is just to do birding for three days (as I planned to stay for three day) and to find black baza without going to the 'Black Baza trail'.

Without a second thought I took his second suggestion that is to search and find this cute raptor.

First day we started birding, it was cloudy but still we could spot some amazing birds like Dollar birds, Crimson backed sunbirds, Ruby-throated bulbuls, White-bellied tree pies etc.

Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

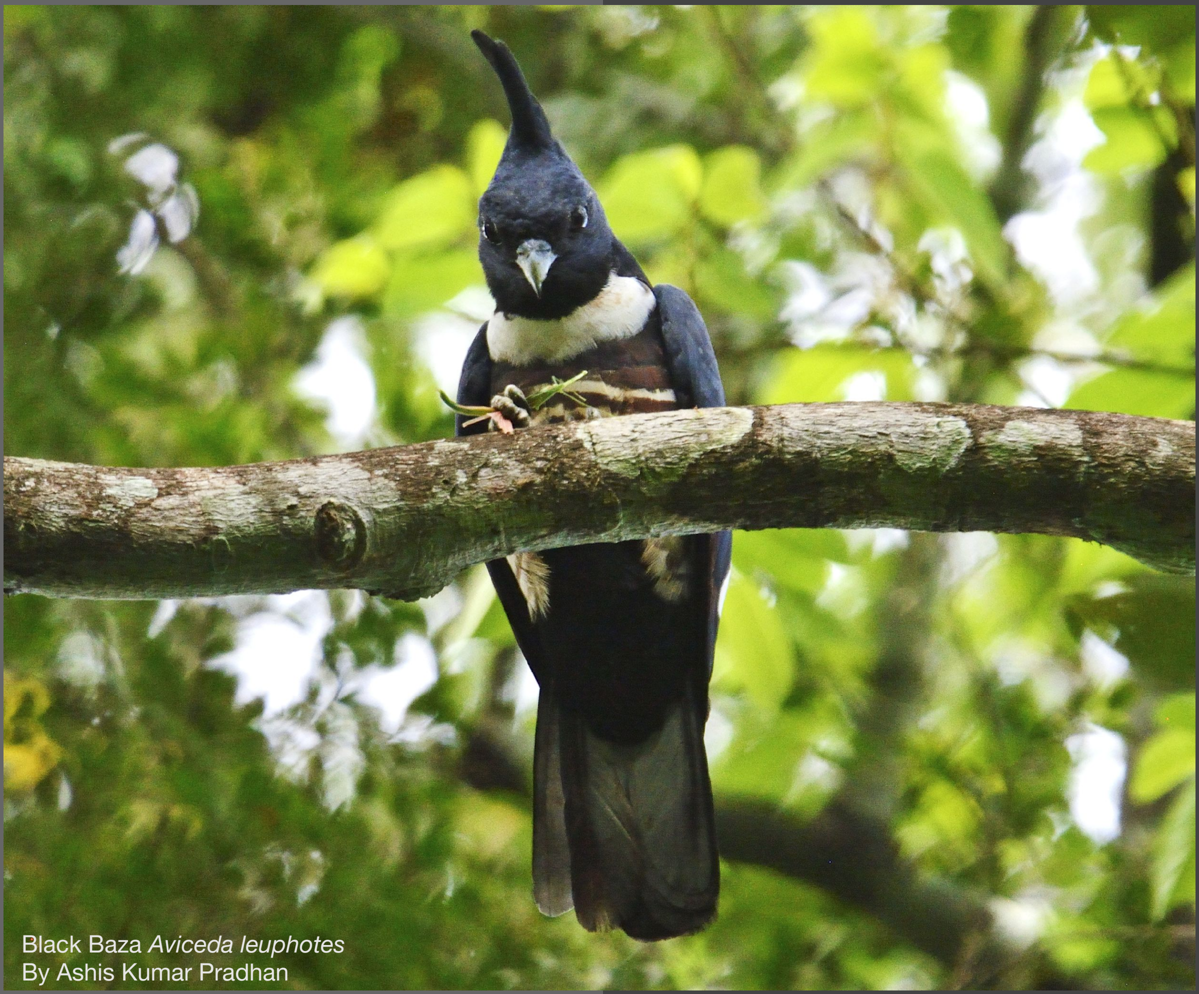
On the second day we moved to Urulanthanni around 12 kms from Jungle bird homestay. As soon as we reached there it started raining heavily, and we had to wait until it stopped raining. After the rain stopped the show started. There was a burst of activity, birds and calls all around the jungle, finally the rain instead of spoiling our day it helped us to have some good sightings like Drongo cuckoo, Velvet fronted Nuthatch etc. All of them being wet gave us ample time to photograph.

I was already finishing the second day, my guide was taking me to all possible locations to find a black baza that he knew. Then we were on our third day, and still I was yet to see a Black Baza. Morning session was very active. Before going to lunch we decided to go and see a brown fish owl and it turned out to be a brown wood owl luckily. While coming back, we were deciding to visit the black baza trail as we did not get it since last three days and ultimately here it was, I could see just a glimpse of Black Baza flying through the open canopy and could not stop shouting, a bird I was waiting to see all this while. Then we entered into the forest and found the black baza hunting grasshoppers. It made my day with a nice greeting and a day worth waiting.

From Thattekad we visited Periyar National park and reached in the afternoon with a little time for birding.

We started birding self-guided, just walking on a pugmark trail. We came onto the main road inside the park and were clicking two Malabar Barbets with different camera settings. Finally I was sitting near Periyar House, and after sometime heard a flight sound which was definitely of a huge bird and to all of our surprise it was a pair of Great Hornbill- the state bird of Kerala. For all of us it was like a treasure to be won.

Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan



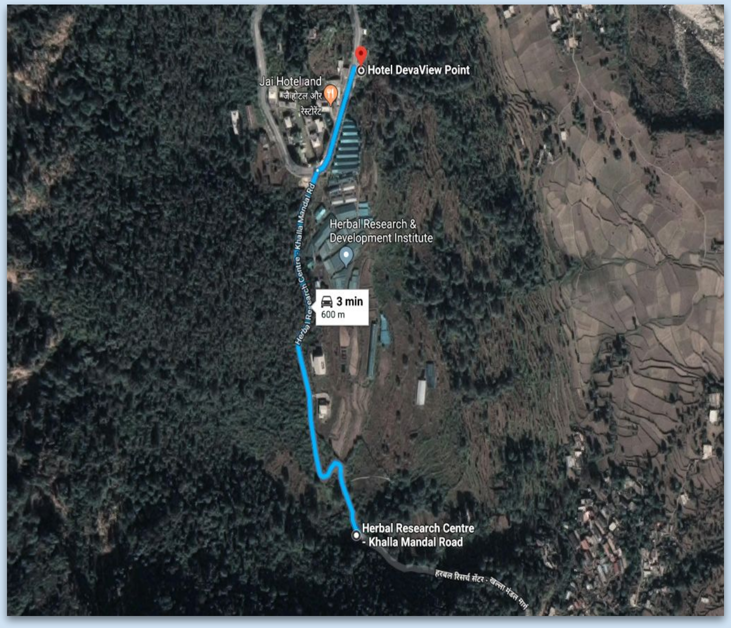
Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*
By Ashis Kumar Pradhan

Mandal & Chopta Trip Report

By Husein Latif

A winter trip to the Himalayan foothills of Uttarakhand had been in the making for quite sometime, and something that we were all eagerly awaiting for. While three of us (KK, Sriram and myself) had been to Uttarakhand before, it was a first time trip for two members of the group (Phani and Naveen). Many promises had been made of the wonders they would see ;)

Our trip had been closely planned and coordinated with Hari Lama, popularly known as the bird saint for birders/bird photographers in this region of India. A down to earth and practical man at all times, his knowledge of birds and species in this region of the Himalayan foothills, stretches 20 years at least if not more and is unparalleled. The man never ceases to amaze and that is his USP.



Birding route at Mandal

The itinerary was as follows - Get to Uttarakhand via Dehradun (stay overnight) and then drive to Mandal (2 night stay) then on to Chopta for 2 nights and come down to Sattal for the last 2 nights, train back to Delhi and fly back to Hyderabad.

Dehradun

An early morning flight on the 5th and we landed in Delhi and got into Dehradun by noon. We had planned an overnight halt and acclimatization in Dehradun and made a late evening visit to the Tibetan Buddhist temple, one of Dehradun's famous landmarks and is known for its beautiful architecture. Later that evening we caught up over dinner and drinks to finalize last minute details of the plan over the next few days.

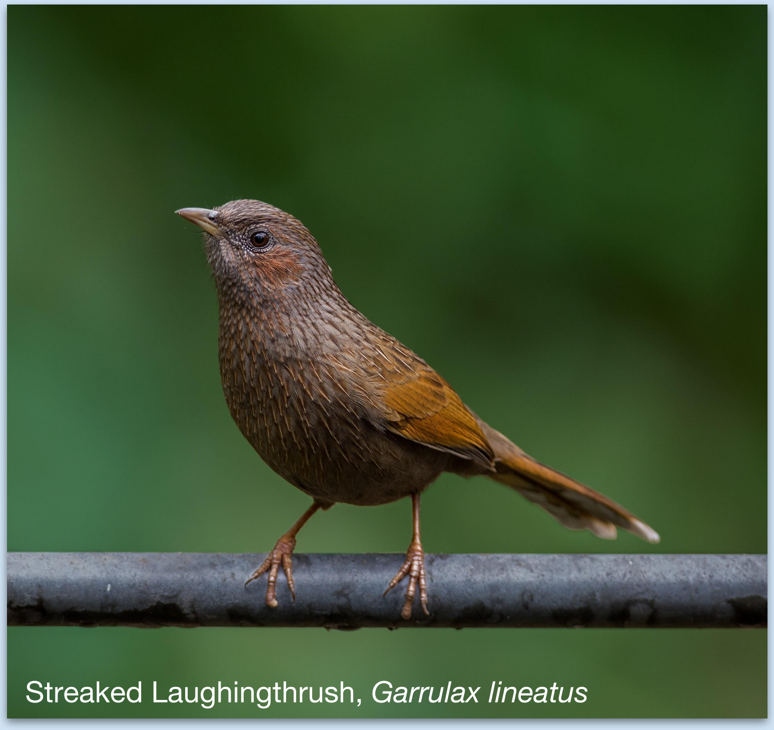
HL
HUSEIN LATIF PHOTOGRAPHY

White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*
By Husein Latif

Mandal

We travelled from Dehradun to Mandal via road the next morning, a 250 odd km distance on scenic and comfortable roads that travel along the rivers of Ganga, Alaknanda & Mandakini.. We had a 4.30 am start, from Dehradun and were able to do some decent birding on the way as well. We were fortunate to see Grey tree-pies, Red-billed blue magpies, Himalayan bulbuls, Blue whistling thrush, Asian barred owlet, White-crested laughingthrush, Steppe Eagles, Chestnut-bellied rock thrush, Yellow-bellied fairy-fantail, Green-tailed sunbird and a River lapwing on the way. We arrived in Mandal, just in time for lunch.

Post lunch the clean fresh air, the chill and the promise of sighting the elusive Scarlet finch among other targets had us set out for a session with Hari Lama.



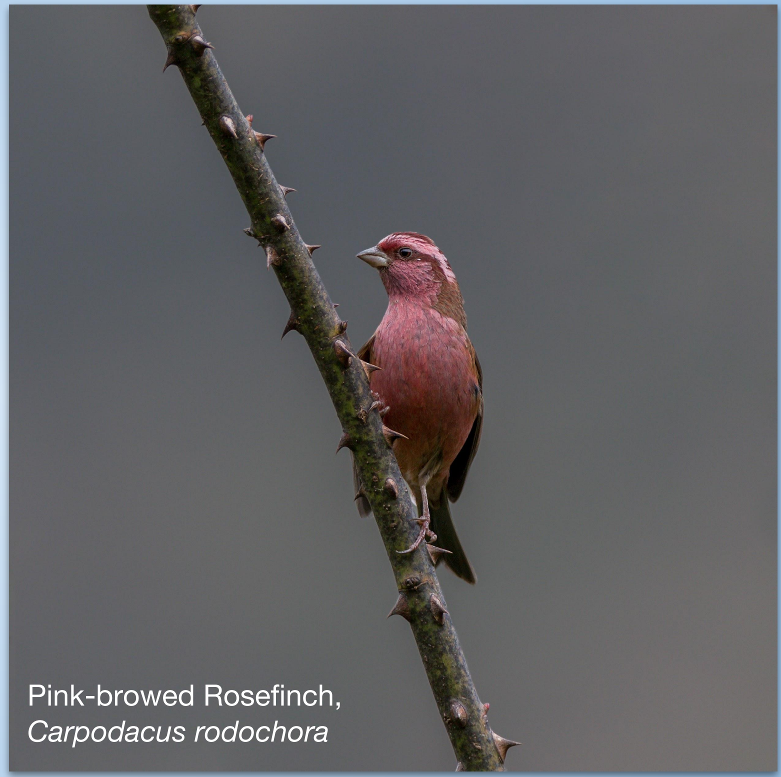
Streaked Laughingthrush, *Garrulax lineatus*

We did our first birding session in Mandal near our place of stay and its surrounding areas, such as the Herbal Research & Development Institute.

Though we weren't able to sight our first target bird of the trip… the Scarlet finch, we had a fruitful session… spotting 3 other types of finches (Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, Pink-browed rosefinch, Spot-winged rosefinch), 2 types of bulbuls (Himalayan and Black bulbul), Himalayan Woodpecker, Variegated laughingthrush, Mountain Hawk-eagle, and Eurasian sparrowhawk.

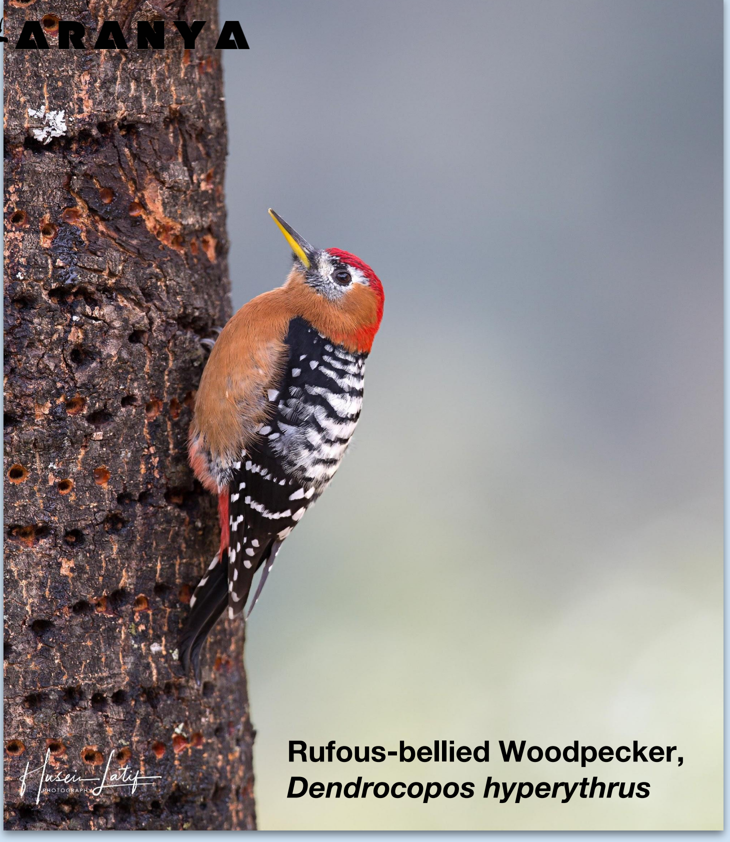
A catch-up over drinks in the evening with discussions on sightings and planning wish lists for the next day. Sun was shining brightly at around 10am but it was still freezing cold.

After a slightly foggy and cold morning we had a fruitful start to the day with good sightings and shots of the Scarlet finch, some up close images of the Rufous bellied woodpecker, other sightings included the Rufous-bellied Niltava, a Himalayan Rock Bunting, a few Yellow-billed blue Magpies, Brown-fronted woodpecker, Streaked laughingthrush, Striated laughingthrush, Chestnut-crowned laughingthrush, Lemon-rumped warblers and Green-backed and cinereous tits, and all of this despite a brief interruption of rain.



Pink-browed Rosefinch,
Carpodacus rodochora

We headed back to our hotel for breakfast, and decided to walk around in the same vicinity, where we had sightings of Bar-winged flycatcher shrike and Mountain Hawk-eagle. Other areas we covered that day at a nearby stream where we sighted and photographed the Brown dipper, Little fork tail, White-capped redstart and Plumbeous water redstart.



Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, ***Dendrocopos hyperythrus***

Chopta

Chopta was our main focus on this trip, and post Mandal we were eager to score some high points capturing images of the pheasants and raptors in this region.

Little Forktail
Mandal, Dec 2017

Little Forktail, ***Enicurus scouleri***

The Himalayan Monal was on everyone's wish list and while we did get quite a few sightings, we weren't lucky enough to get a clean shot of this elusive but vibrant bird. We however did get lucky with the Koklass pheasant and it made up for the tough luck with the Himalayan Monal. We were blessed to have a male Koklass strutting around proudly in broad morning light, while trying to coax his partner to cross the road. Giving us a 10 minute display of all possible angles and stances, the smiles on everyone's faces thereafter cannot be repeated, as never had we got such an clear view of this shy bird.

White-capped Redstart
Mandal, Dec 2017

White-capped Redstart, ***Chaimarrornis leucocephalus***

Raptors in this region was on everyone's radar and while we often sighted Lammergeier, Griffons, Himalayan Buzzards Golden Eagles and Steppe Eagles soaring above us we only got lucky while driving out of Chopta to Makku Bend. Thirty minutes away we started noticing large numbers of raptors circling around a hillside. On further inspection, we discovered a calf that was roadkill, had attracted large numbers of Eurasian and Himalayan Griffons feasting on its carcass. It was a sight to be seen, griffons coming in to land, taking off, fighting each other and picking the remains of the dead calf. They however wouldn't let any of the other raptor species such as the Cinereous Vultures, Bearded vulture or Lammergeiers anywhere close to the carcass. We ended up spending a good two hours at this spot capturing the action.

Brown Dipper, ***Cinclus pallasii***

After Chopta we drove down to Sattal to spend the last two days where we spent time at the Sattal studio and Chafi among other spots.

Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike, *Hemipus picatus*

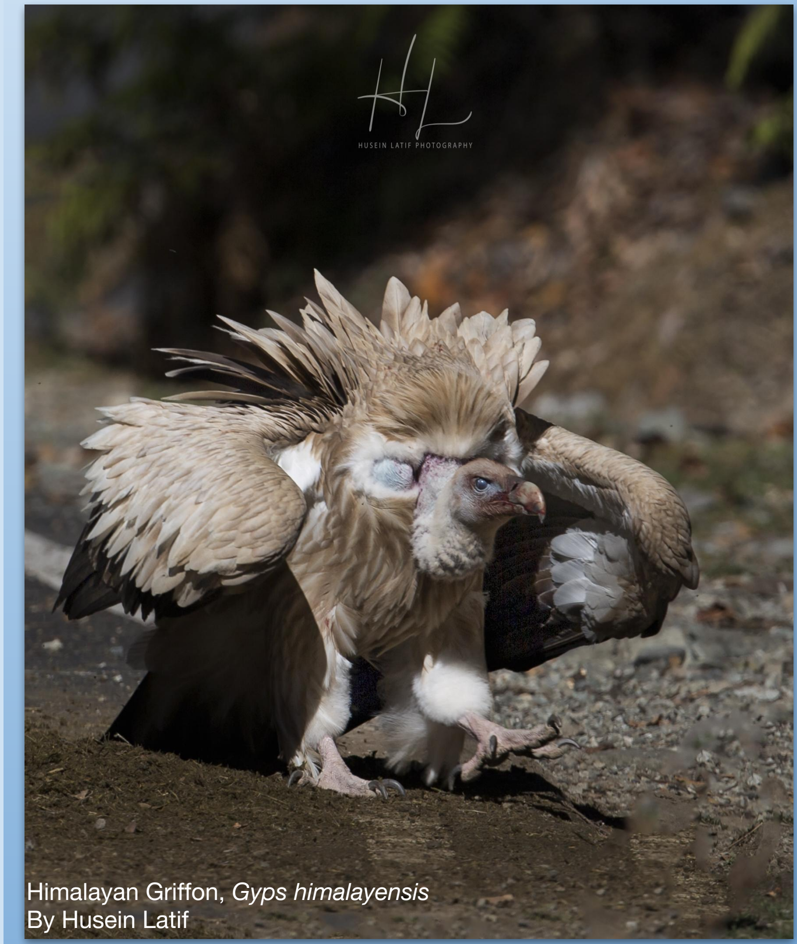
The drive to Sattal was exciting as we came to a spot where we sighted the Wallcreeper. This was a lifer for all of us, and it more than made up for the 8-hour long drive that we had to reach Sattal.

Koklass Pheasant,
Pucrasia macrolopha
By Husein Latif

We wrapped up a successful trip, having sighted close to a 100 species we settled into our overnight train journey back to Delhi via Kathgodam, to fly back into Hyderabad, satisfied that the trip had been a good one. Kudos to Sriram for having taken care of the planning and the logistics for the trip.

Coal Tit, *Periparus ater*
By Naveen Sama

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*
By Husein Latif


Himalayan Griffon, *Gyps himalayensis*
By Husein Latif

ISSUE 06 JANUARY 2018

Birding on Wheels

By Abhishek Ravindra

Travelling is very common for people in India. We are a large country and we travel varying distances to places. such as our native place, to the next town,to different cities to visit our friends,on work, with family, and of course we travel to distant birding spots. With so much travel a birder can actually use this time to spot birds in places we never have thought of birding in. In the wilderness along the Roads and Railroads of India through different states there is a large scope of birding and if one masters the art of birding on wheels then there is always plenty of lifers, waiting to fall in your bucket. Here is a walkthrough about birding while travelling, and ways you can master this art with some of my very cherished sightings which came as a result of Birding on Wheels.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

Taken from Bus,Tezpur, Assam

Starting off with the gear you will need try to use a medium focal length lens i personally use 28-135 and shoot at 135 we get a wider shot but when we zoom the shot will be enough for identification but something that must be remembered is getting good shot is not the motive here not missing any shot is the target.

Prefocus is an important step here and you should prefocus in the region where you are most likely to find a bird in my case i pre-focus on the wires adjacent to the track or road where i usually see many birds perched.

Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*

Taken from Train Faridabad,Haryana

Now coming to the way you should be seated it's always better to sit against the direction you are heading so you have enough time to capture the bird even after you cross it but it may differ from person to person.

Scanning banks of water bodies on bridges and lake beds adjacent to the road is important as you may see something in the photograph that you could have missed

Keeping the shutter speed in mind is very important as you are moving and a high shutter speed is therefore necessary.

Firing a burst of shots is an important method so one can have enough angles and shots to identify the bird.

I hope these small tricks help you not only locate more birds. More importantly it is worth taking the effort of birding while travelling, you may spot something you've never seen before. There always will be days and periods during the day when you don't see anything at all but not giving up and continuously birding throughout the journey will help you bag some more lifers. I have had lot of cherishable moments while birding from trains and busses like watching Sarus crane in multiple occasions in fields and seeing a flock of Common Shelducks near Chambal area and Egyptian vultures while travelling to Delhi,Sighting Amur falcons on the way to Thiruvananthapuram in a bus, Watching Fulvous Whistling Duck in Lake near Warangal and River Lapwing in Adilabad district of Telangana,White Bellied Sea Eagle in Chilka through train are just some of the amazing moments i had while birding from a train.

Lesser Adjutant,
Leptoptilos javanicus

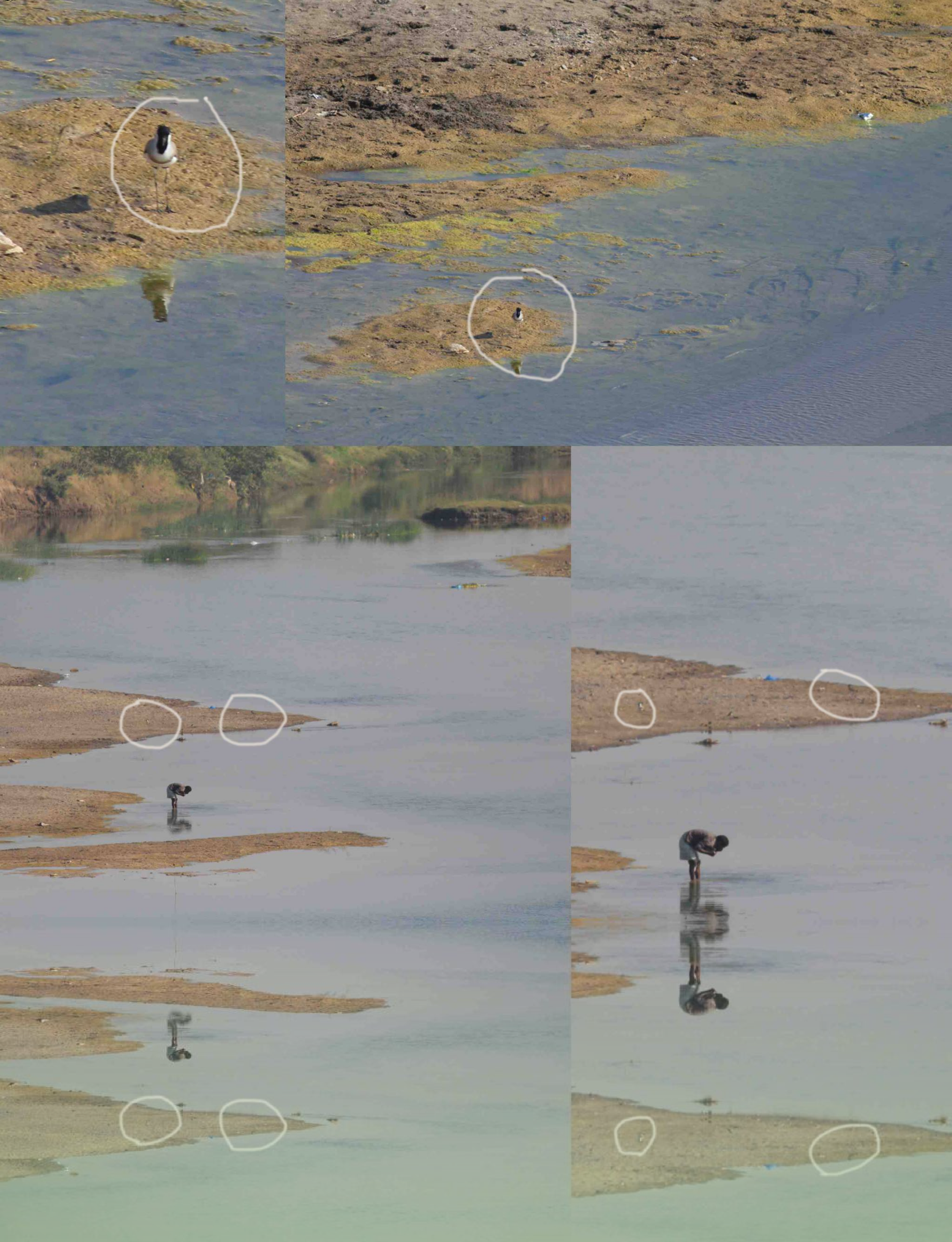
Taken from bus Kaziranga, Assam

White Bellied Sea Eagle
Haliaeetus leucogaster

Taken from train Chilika, Odisha

I have always been lucky getting window seats and enjoyed the privilege of having the opportunity to spread the knowledge of birding to people while travelling. Through on buses and trains one should be careful as you can become a target of thieves in public transport. An important piece of advice, is to never go near the doors of the train/bus and do birding as it can be very dangerous.I hope this article will help you bag some lifers.

Happy Birding



Sighting of River Lapwing while crossing a bridge in train.
Notice the advantage of zooming the image.

Notable Telangana Sightings by HBP in 2017

Jan 2017
- Malabar Whistling-Thrush
- Isabelline Wheatear
- Black Stork
- Malabar Pied-Hornbill
- Common Quail
- Banded Bay Cuckoo

Feb 2017
- Indian Blue Robin
- Brown Boobook
- Eastern Marsh-Harrier
- Rusty-tailed Flycatcher
- Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
- Rufous-fronted Prinia

Mar 2017
- Western Reef-Heron
- Black-capped Kingfisher
- Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo

Apr 2017
- Oriental Scops-Owl
- Oriental Turtle-Dove
- White-winged Tern

May 2017
- Greater Yellownape
- Malabar Trogon
- Green-billed Malkoha
- Rufous Woodpecker
- Heart-spotted Woodpecker
- Black-crested Bulbul

Jun 2017
- Indian Vulture
- White-rumped Needletail

Jul 2017
- Red-whiskered Bulbul
- Indian Scops-Owl

Aug 2017
- Watercock
- Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo

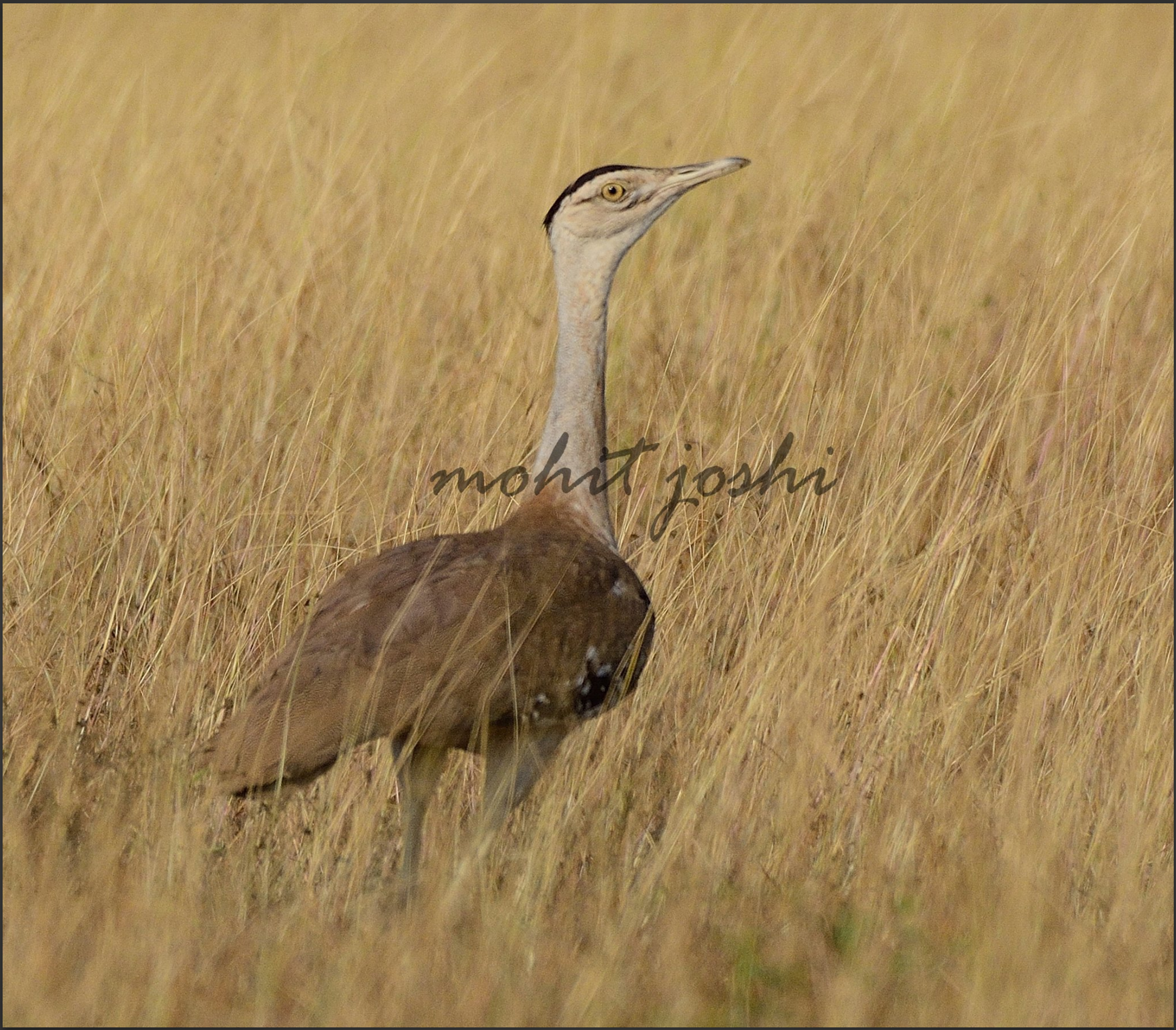
Sep 2017
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Common Flameback
- Terek Sandpiper
- Lesser Sand-Plover
- Common Tern
- Indian Nuthatch

Oct 2017
- Lesser Kestrel
- Great Indian Bustard
- Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl
- Lesser Florican
- Large-billed Leaf Warbler
- Rusty-tailed Flycatcher

Nov 2017
- Tickell's Leaf Warbler
- Common Crane
- Thick-billed Warbler
- Painted Sandgrouse
- Eastern Orphean Warbler
- Eurasian Wryneck

Dec 2017
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk
- Brown Boobook
- Southern Gray Shrike
- European Starling
- Malabar Whistling-Thrush
- Hair-crested Drongo

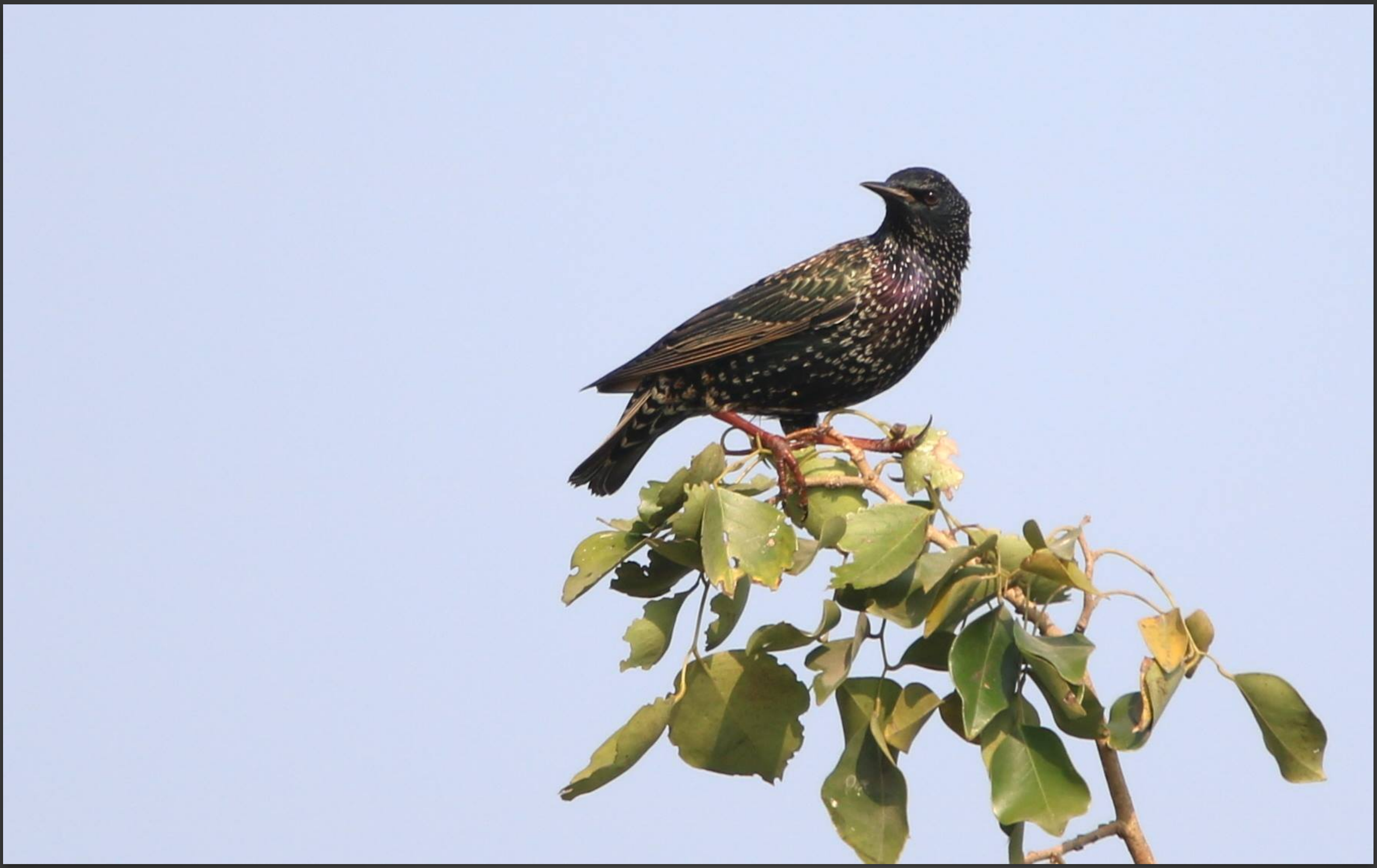
Notable Sightings


mohit joshi

© Mohit Joshi

Great Indian Bustard *(Ardeotis nigriceps)*
Andhra Pradesh

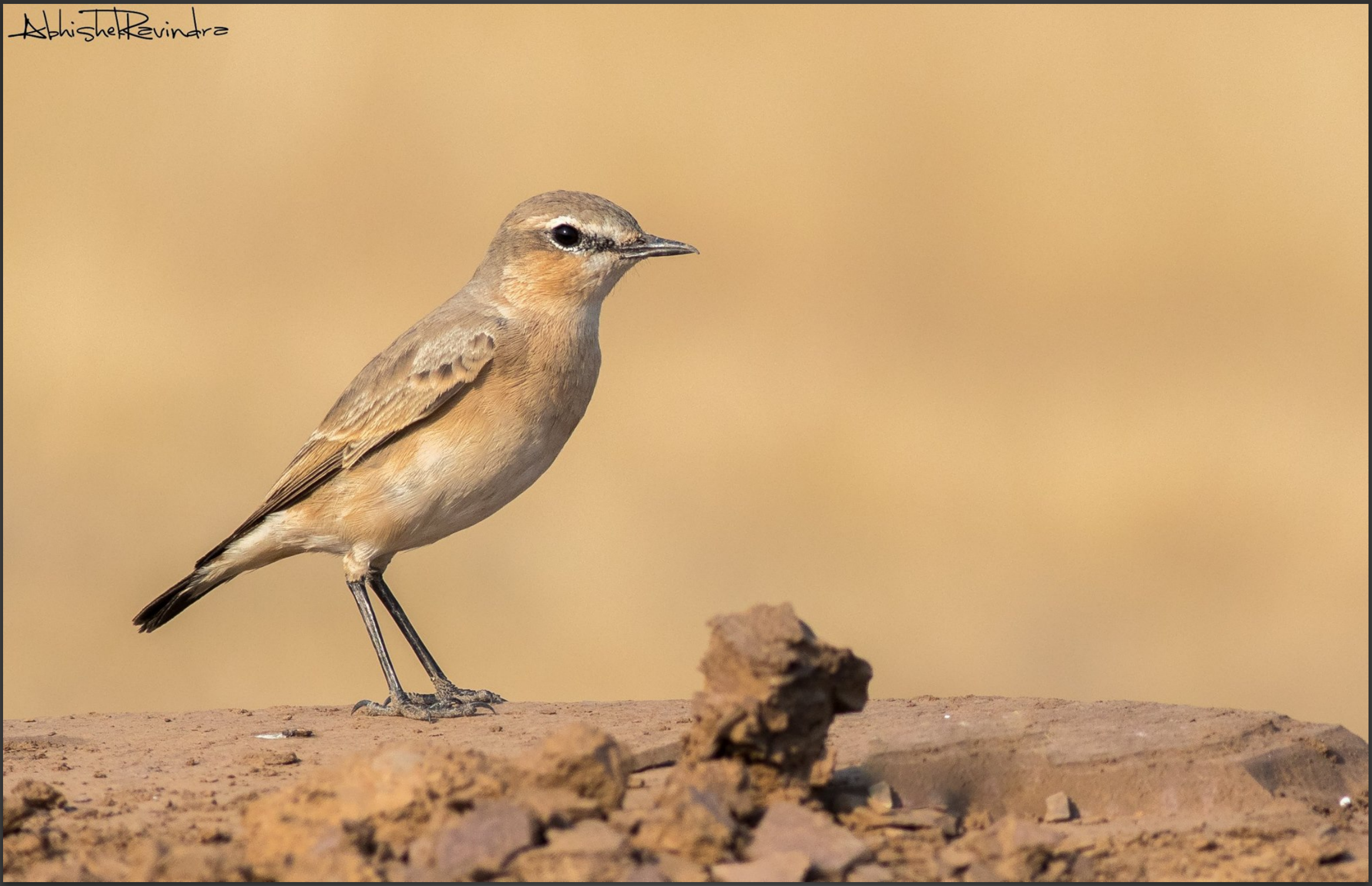
Notable Sightings



© Bhaarat Vyas

Common starling *(Sturnus vulgaris)*
Himayat Sagar, Hyderabad

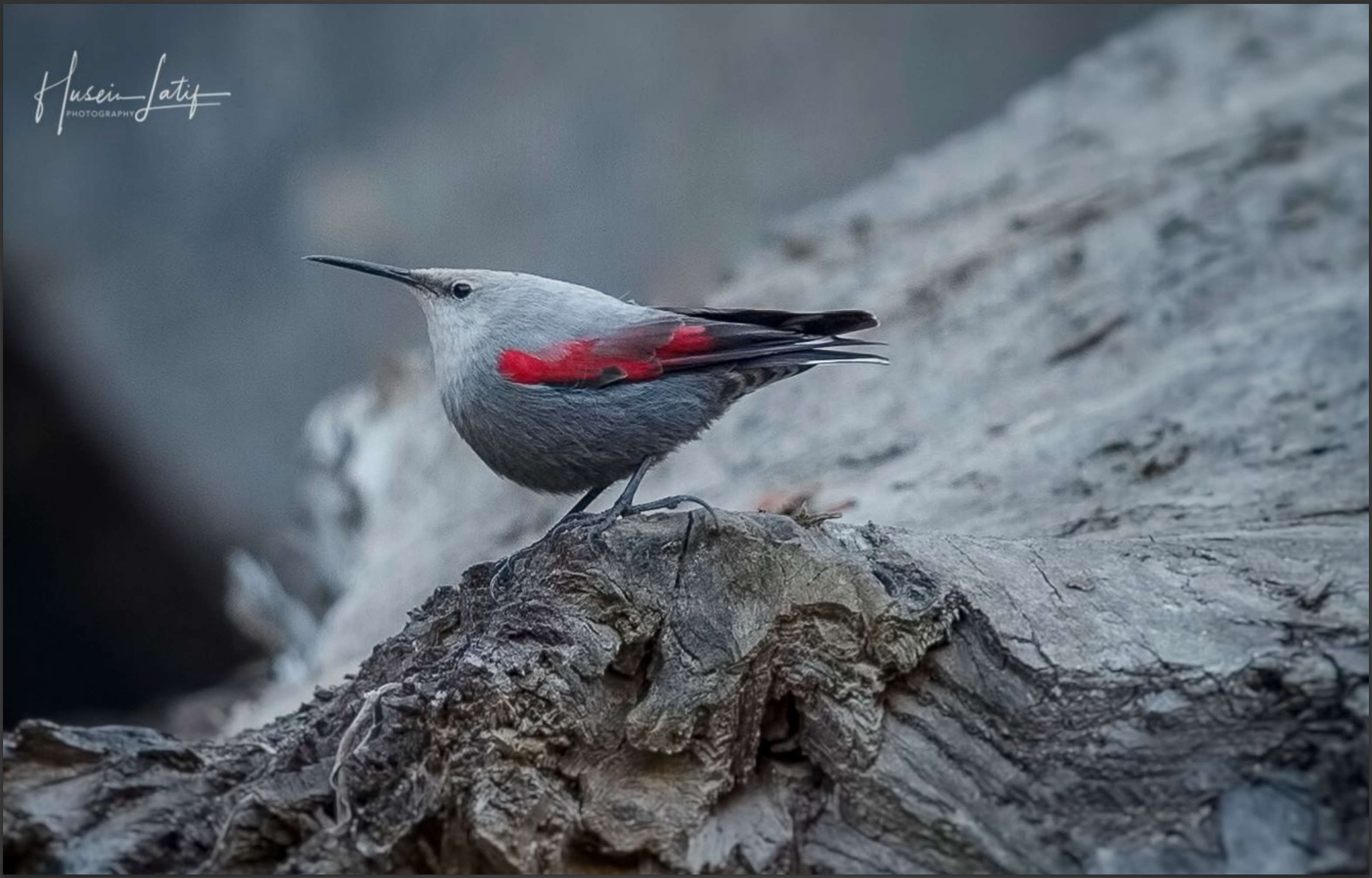
Notable Sightings


AbhishekRavindra

© Abhishek Ravindra

Isabelline Wheatear *(Oenanthe isabellina)*
Rollapadu, Andhra Pradesh

Notable Sightings


Husein Latif
PHOTOGRAPHY

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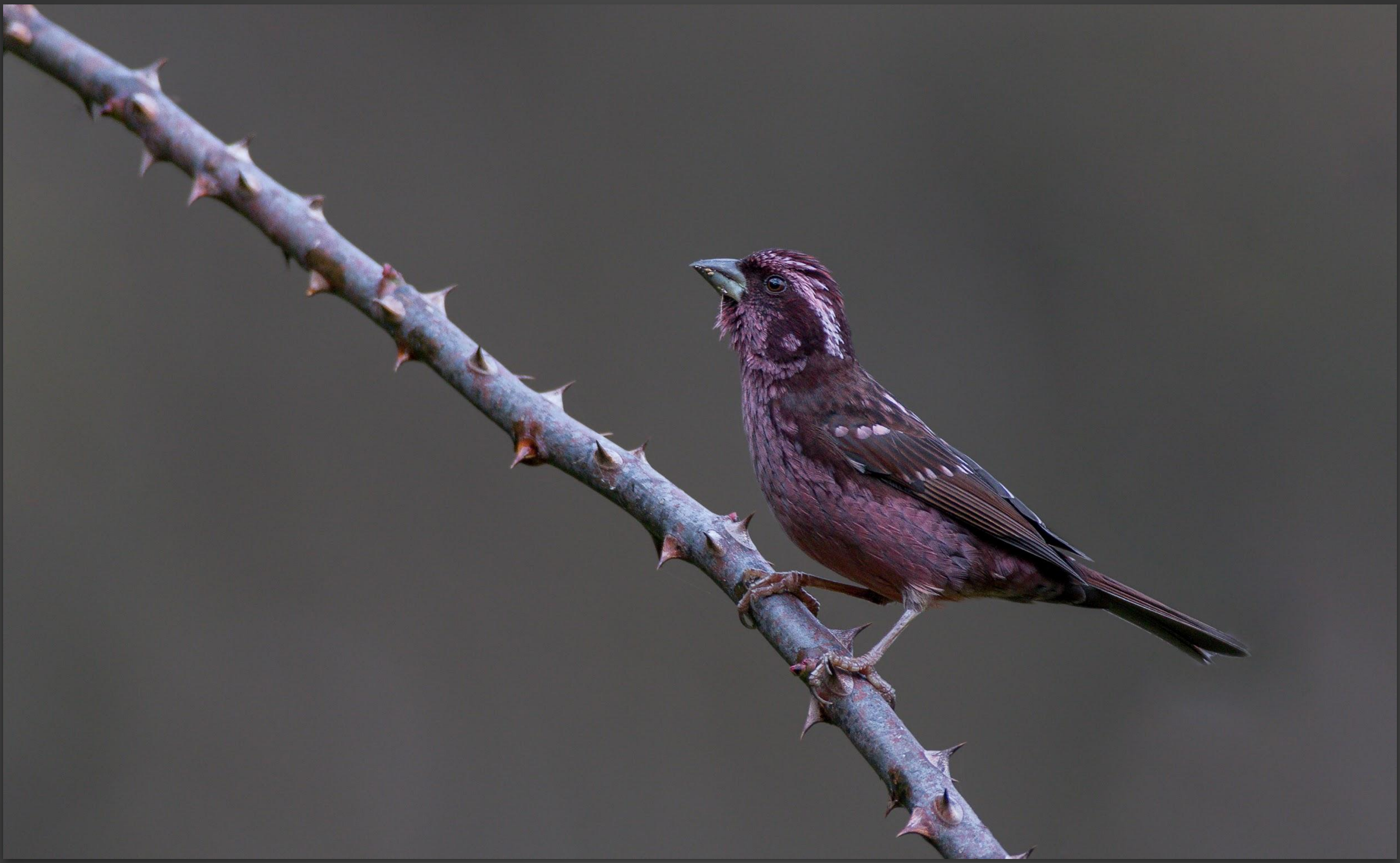
Wallcreeper *(Tichodroma muraria)*
Chopta, Uttarakhand

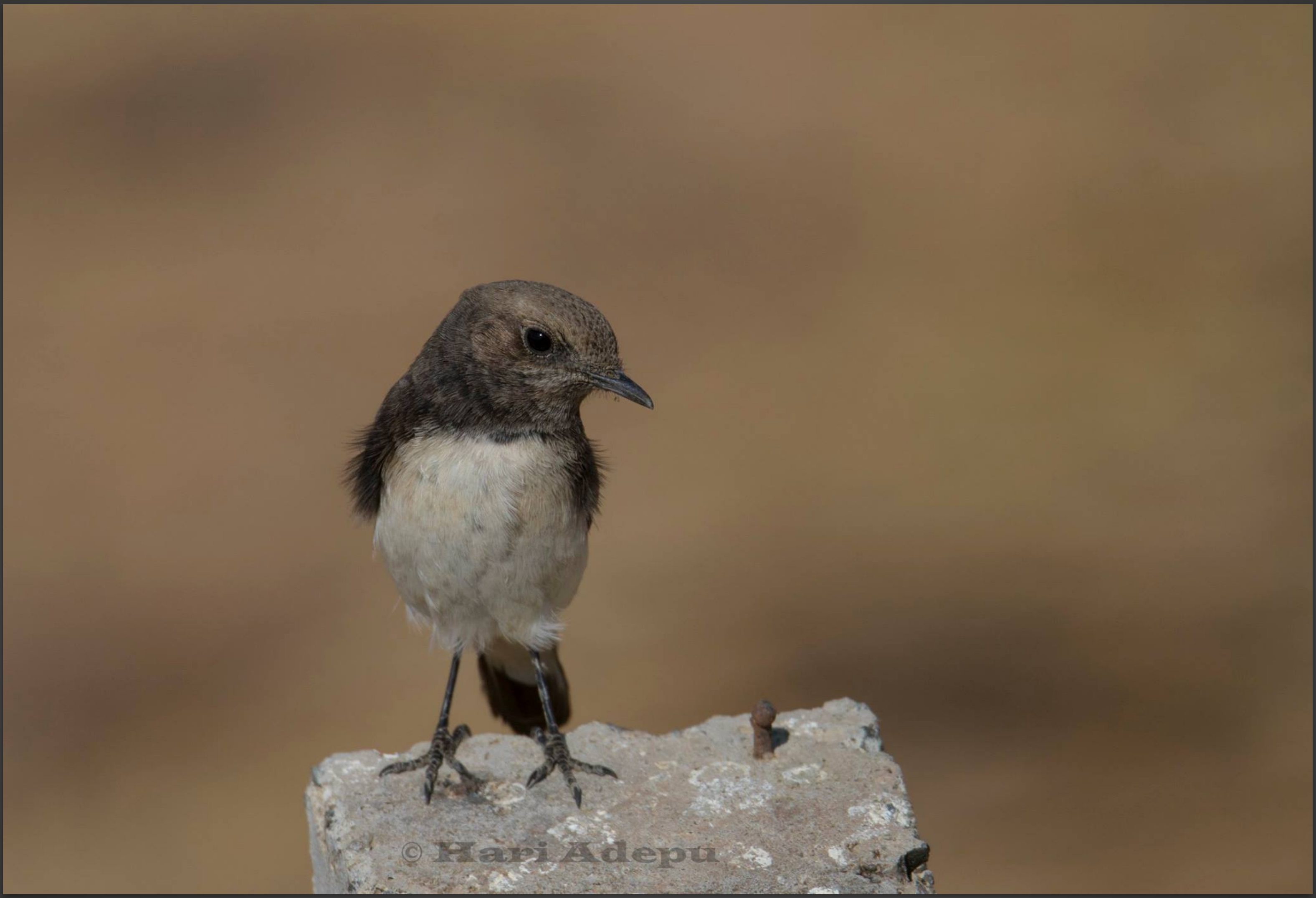
Notable Sightings



© Phani Krishna Raavi

Spot-Winged Rosefinch *(Carpodacus rodopeplus)*
Chopta, Uttarakhand

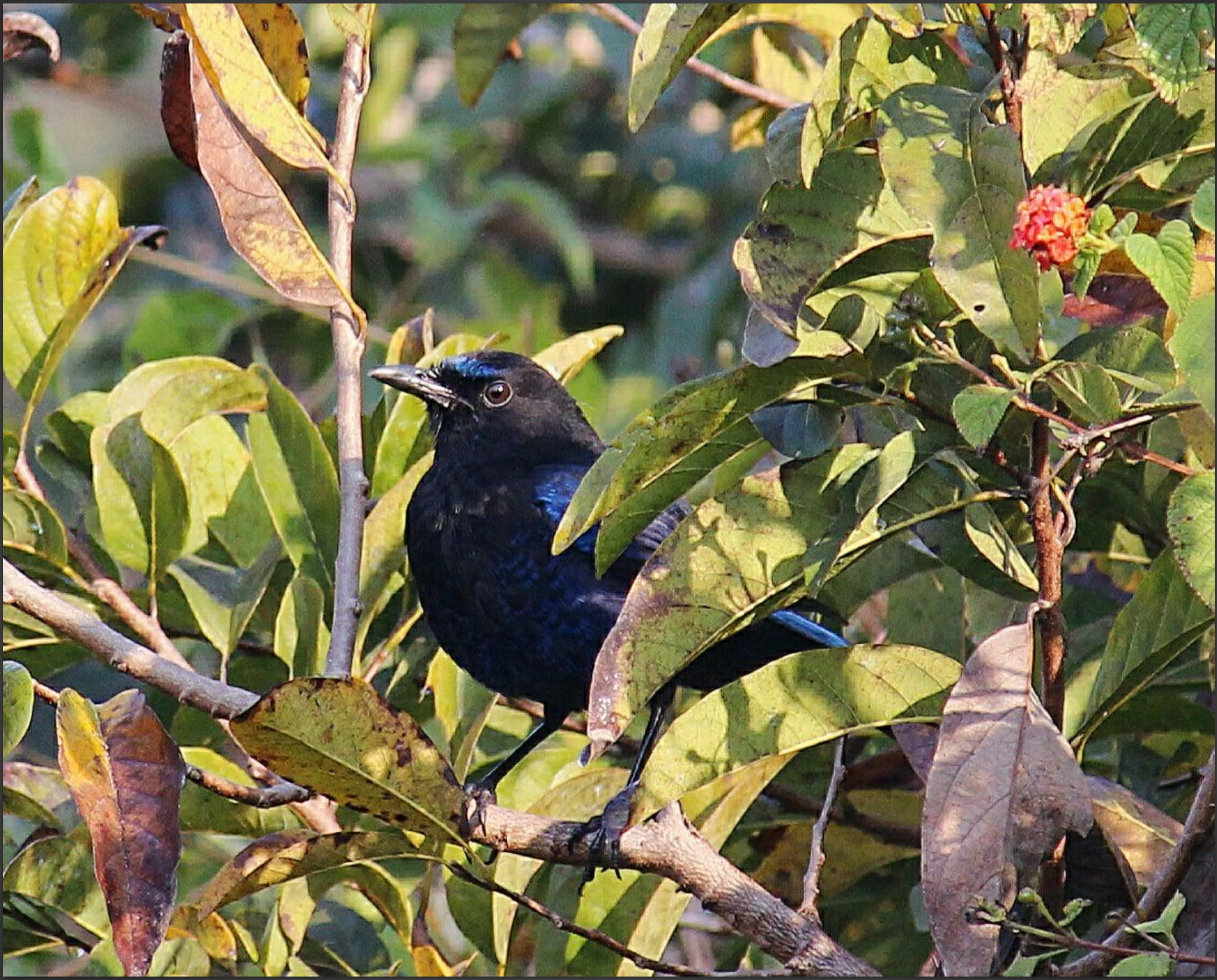
Notable Sightings


© Hari Adepu

© Harikrishna Adepu

***Variable Wheatear** (Oenanthe picata)*
Great Rann of Kutch, Gujarat

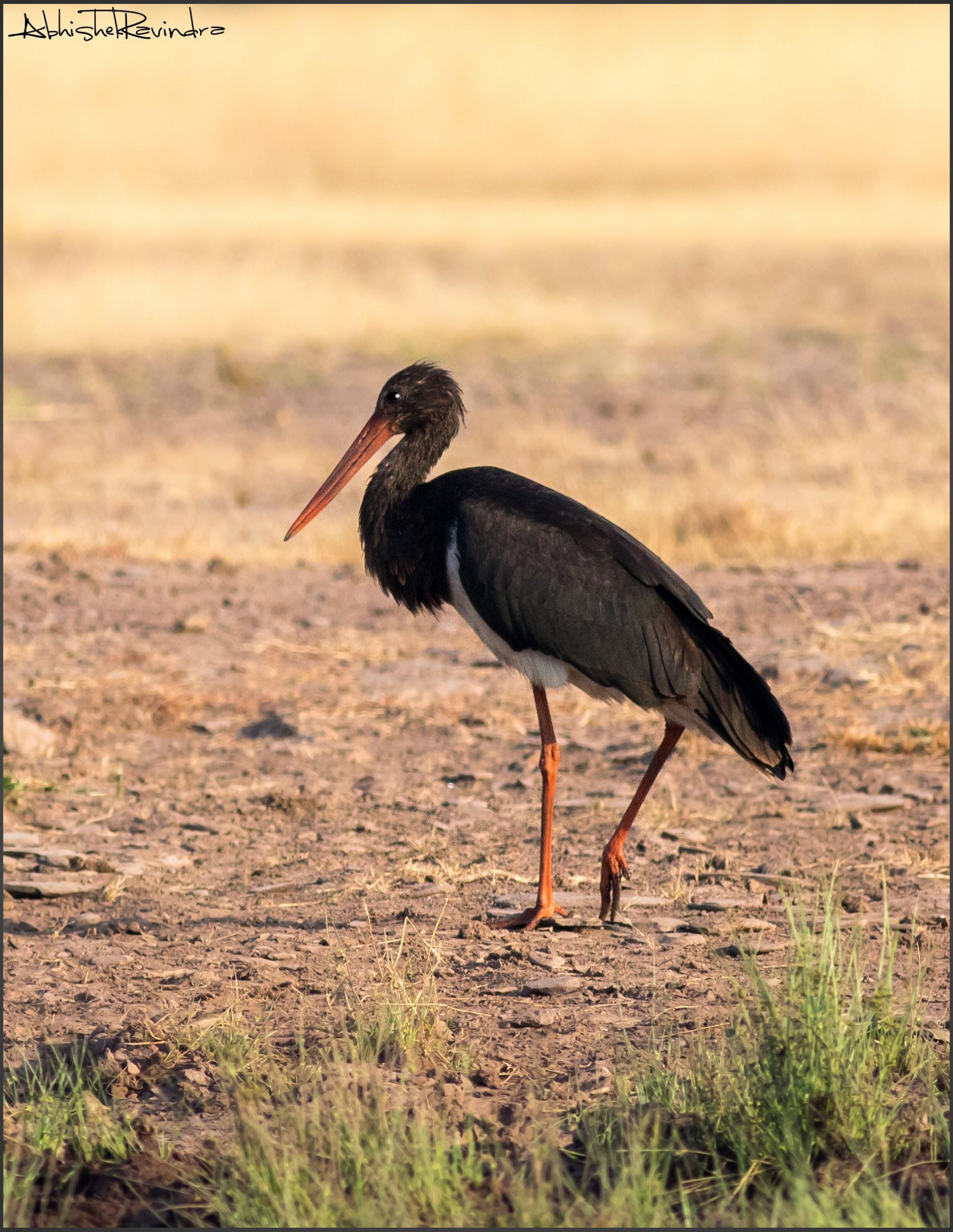
Notable Sightings



© Srinivas Kolla

Malabar whistling thrush *(Myophonus horsfieldii)*
Narsapur Forest, Telangana

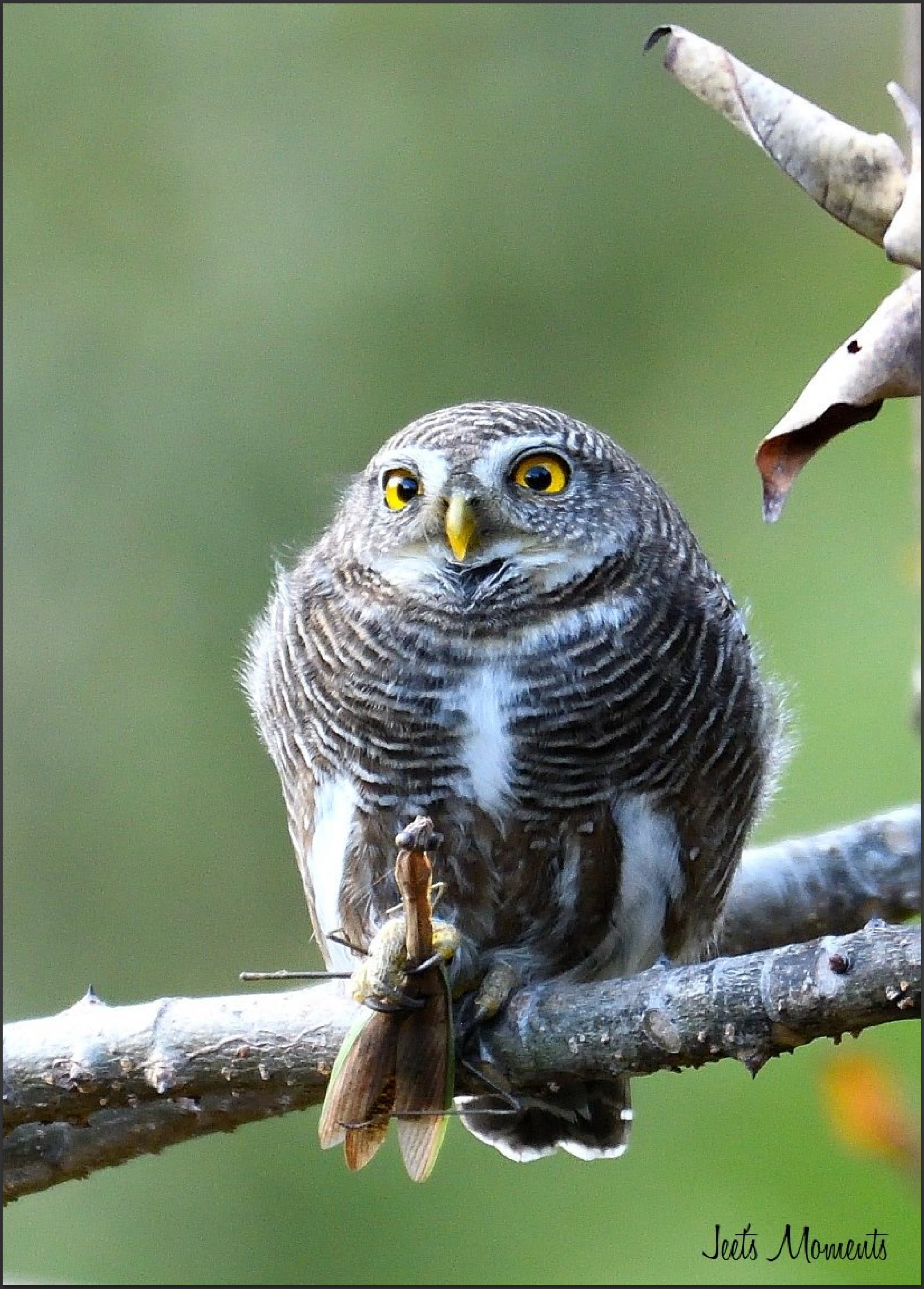
Notable Sightings


AbhishekRavindra

© ***Abhishek Ravindra***

Black stork *(Ciconia nigra)*
Rollapadu, Andhra Pradesh

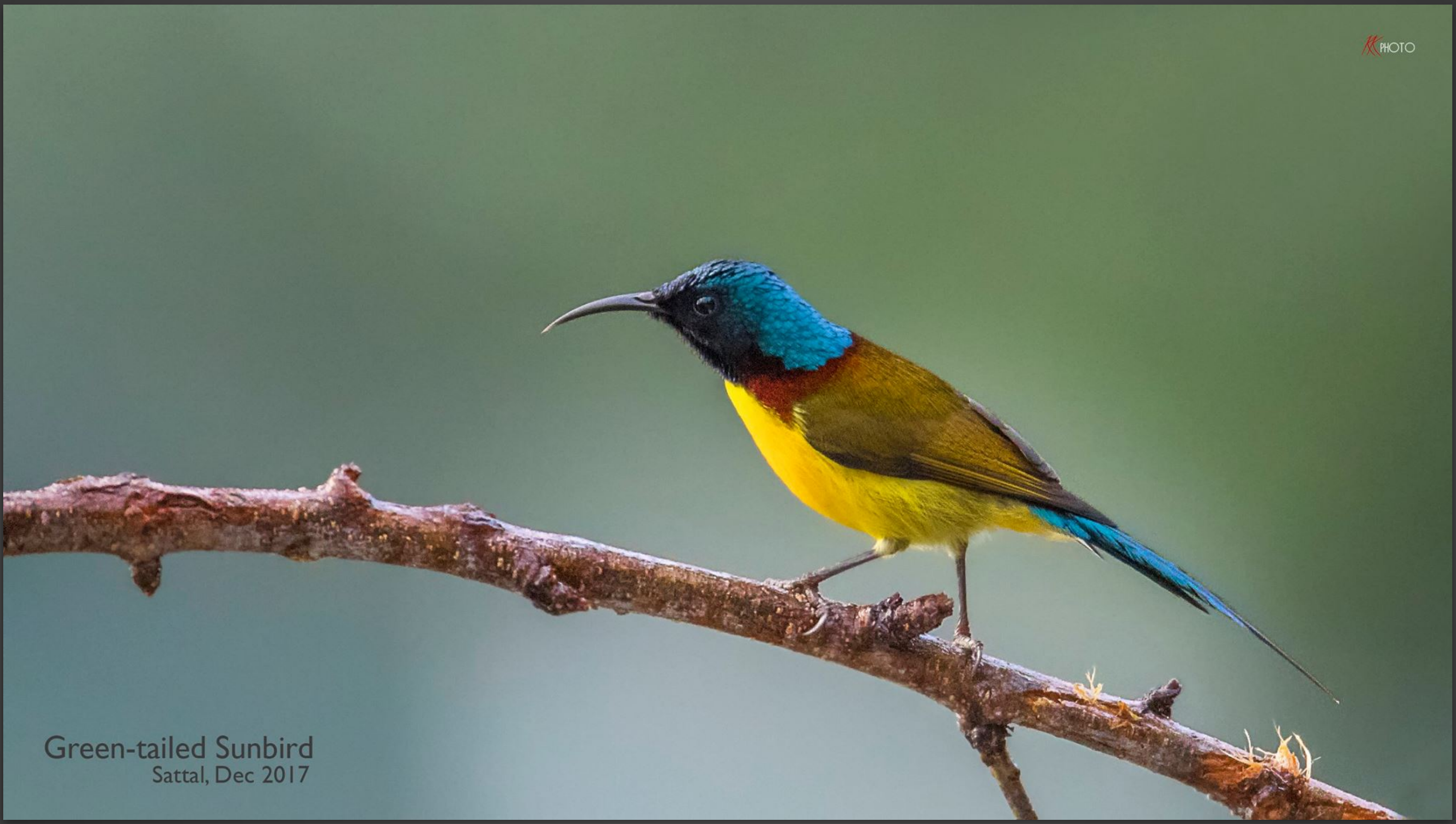
Photographer’s Corner


Jeets Moments

© Jeet Aman

Asian barred owlet *(Glaucidium cuculoides*)
Sattal,Uttarakhand

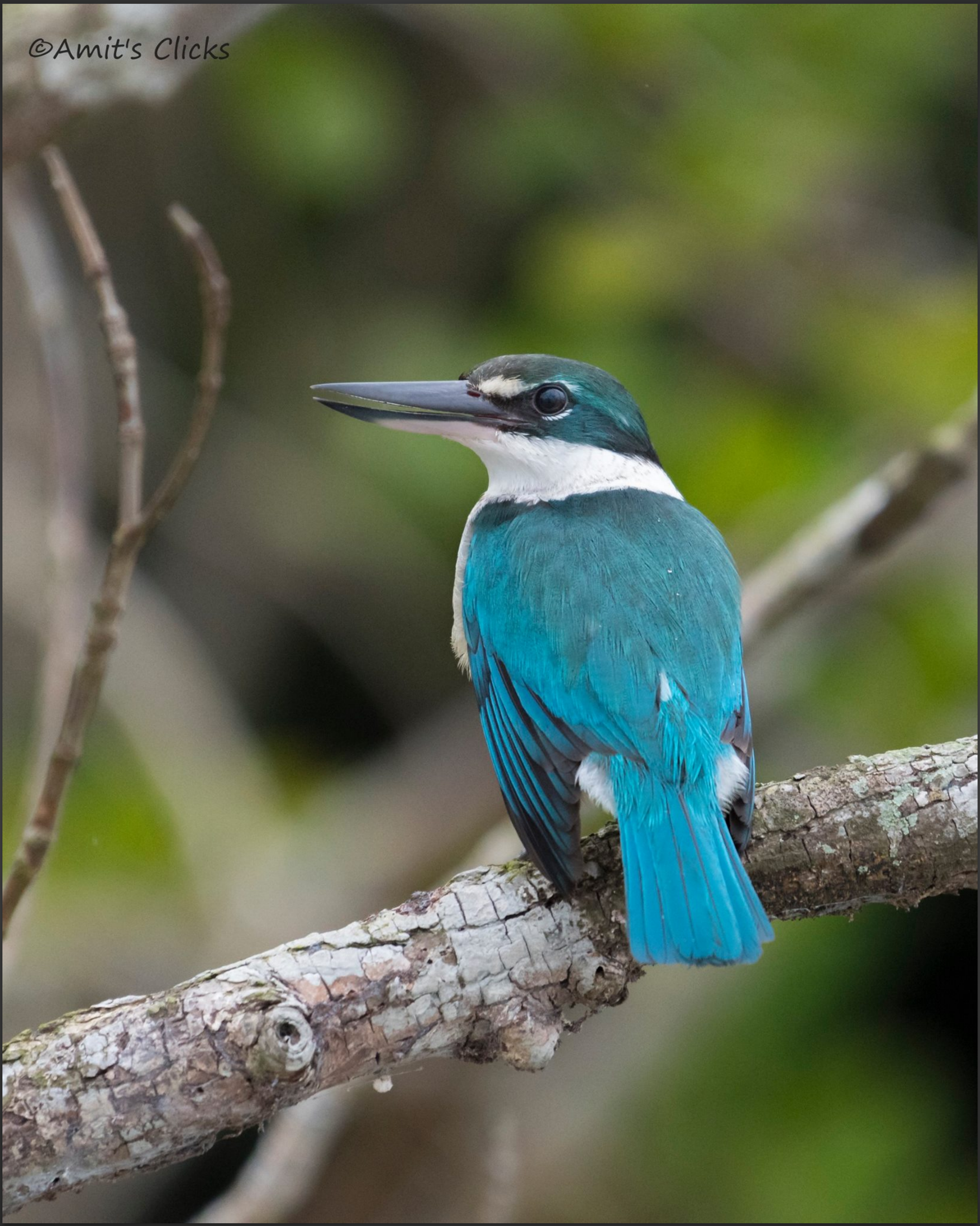
Photographer’s Corner


KK PHOTO
Green-tailed Sunbird
Sattal, Dec 2017

© Kumar Kanchu

Green Tailed Sunbird
Aethopyga nipelenesis)
sattal,Uttarakhand

Photographer's Corner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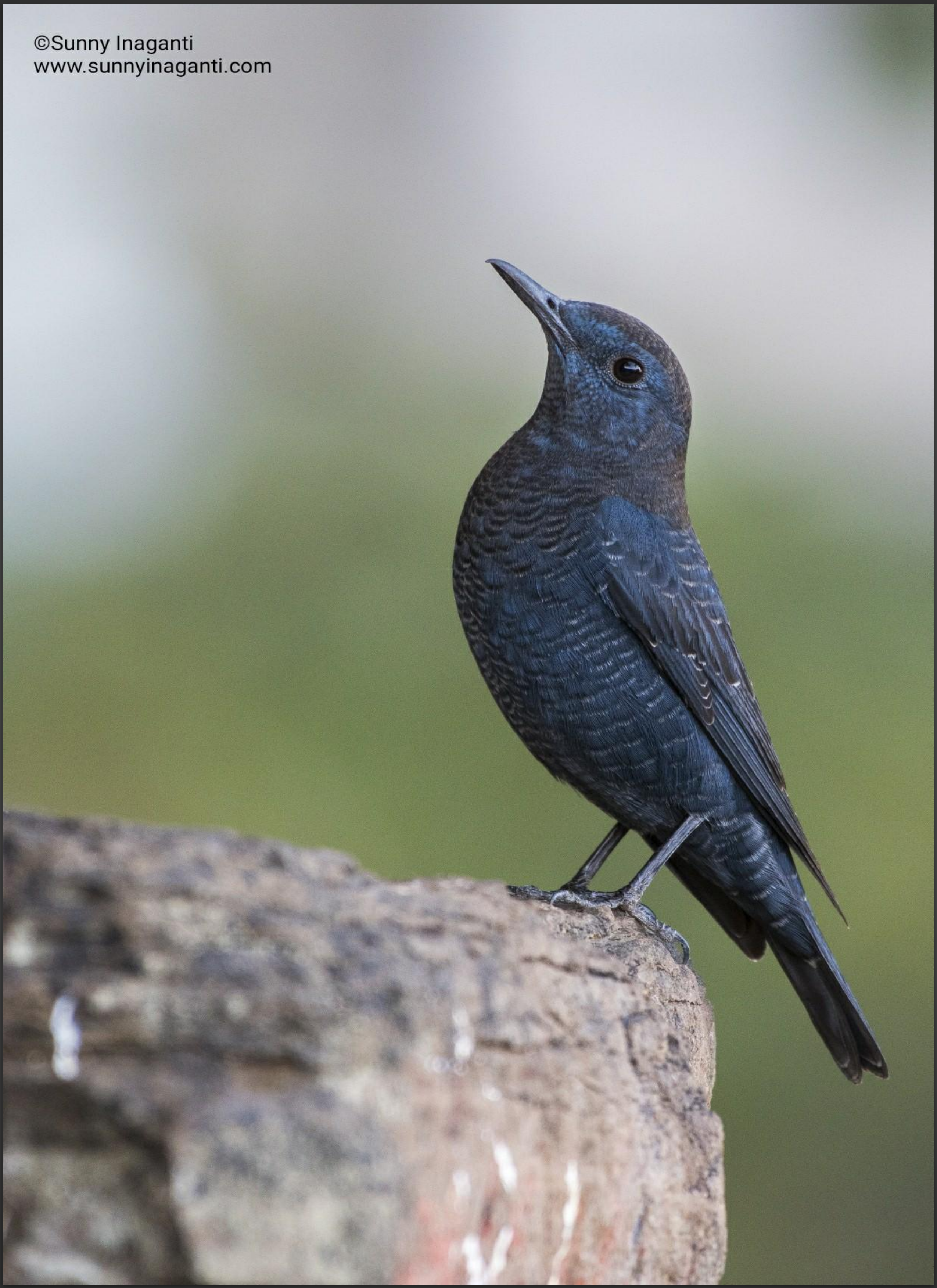
Collared Kingfisher (*Todiramphus chloris*)
Sundarbans,West Bengal

Photographer's Corner



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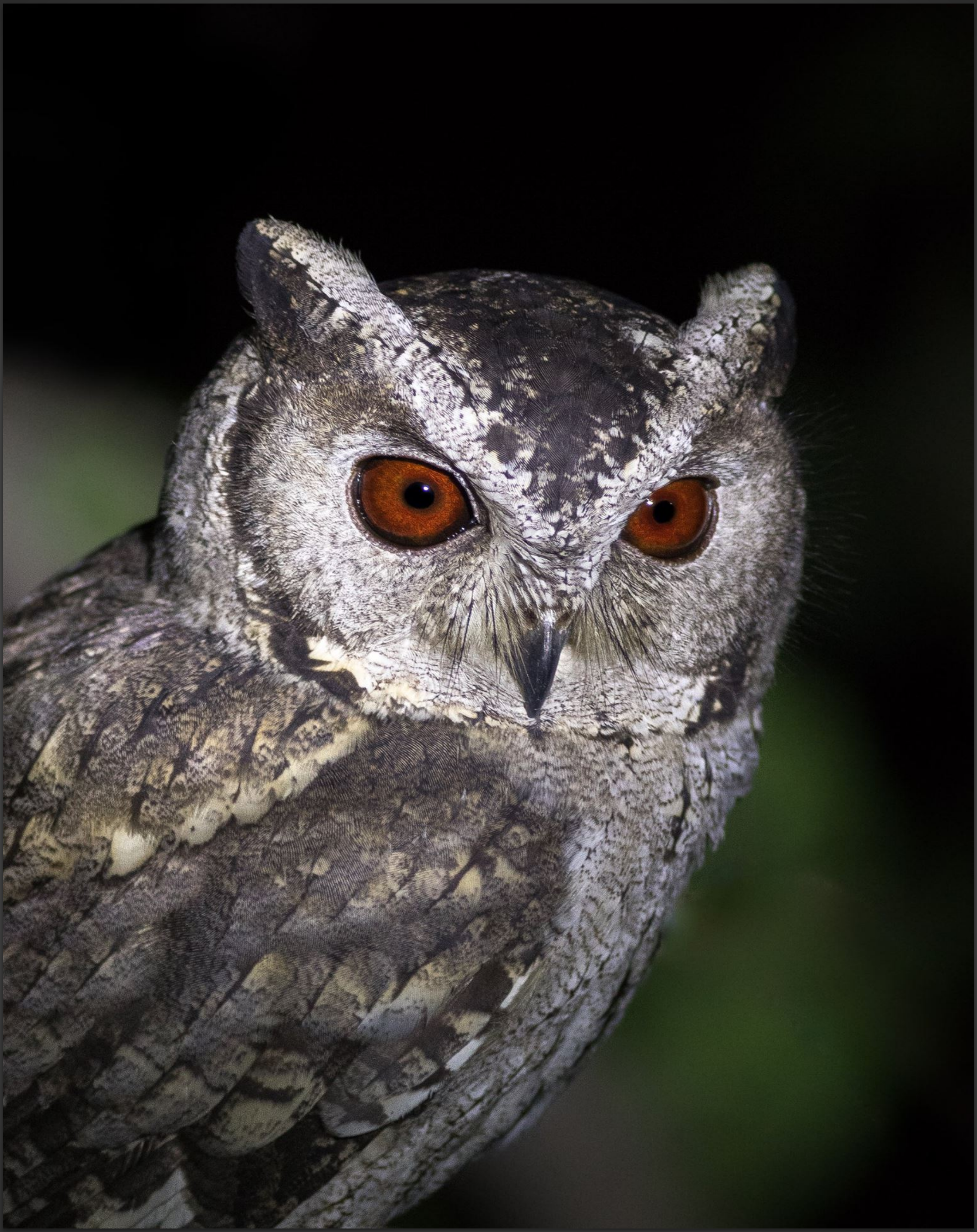
www.sunnyinaganti.com

© Sunny Inaganti

Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solatirius*)
Mahabubnagar,Telangana

Photographer's Corner



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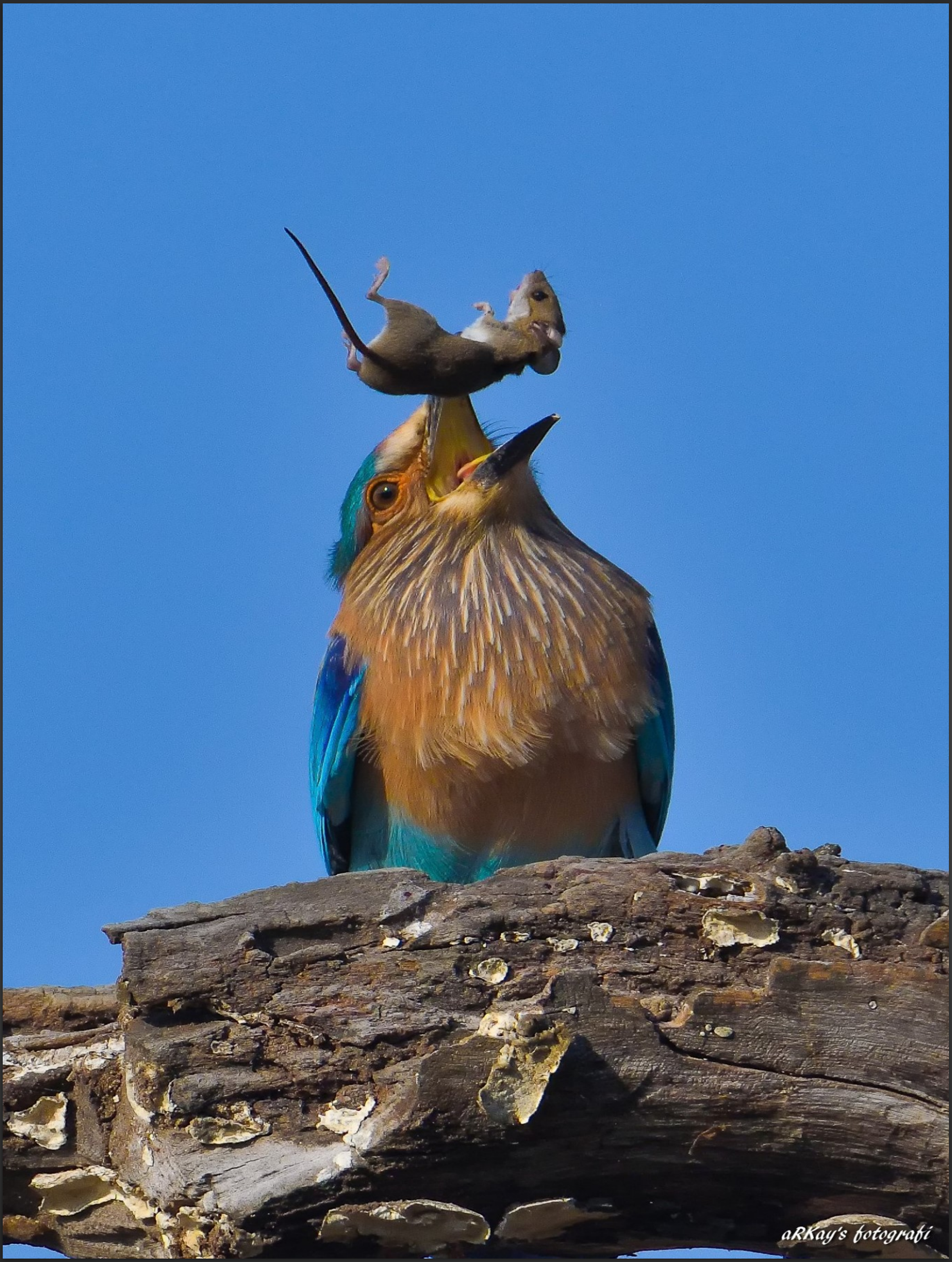
Indian Scops Owl *(Otus bakkamoena))*
Mahabubnagar,Telangana

Photographer's Corner


aRKay's fotografi

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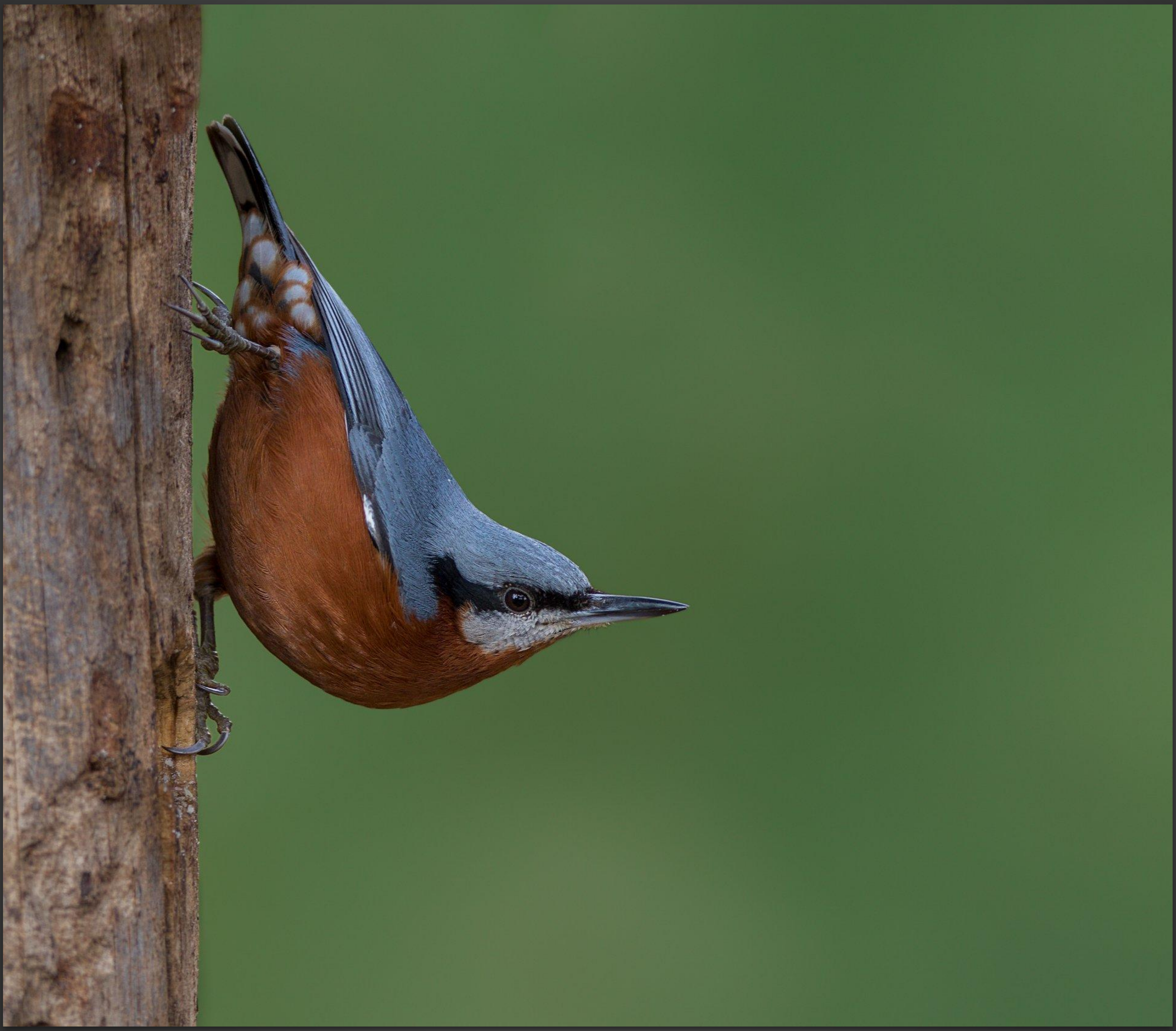
Indian Roller *(Coaracias benghalensis)*

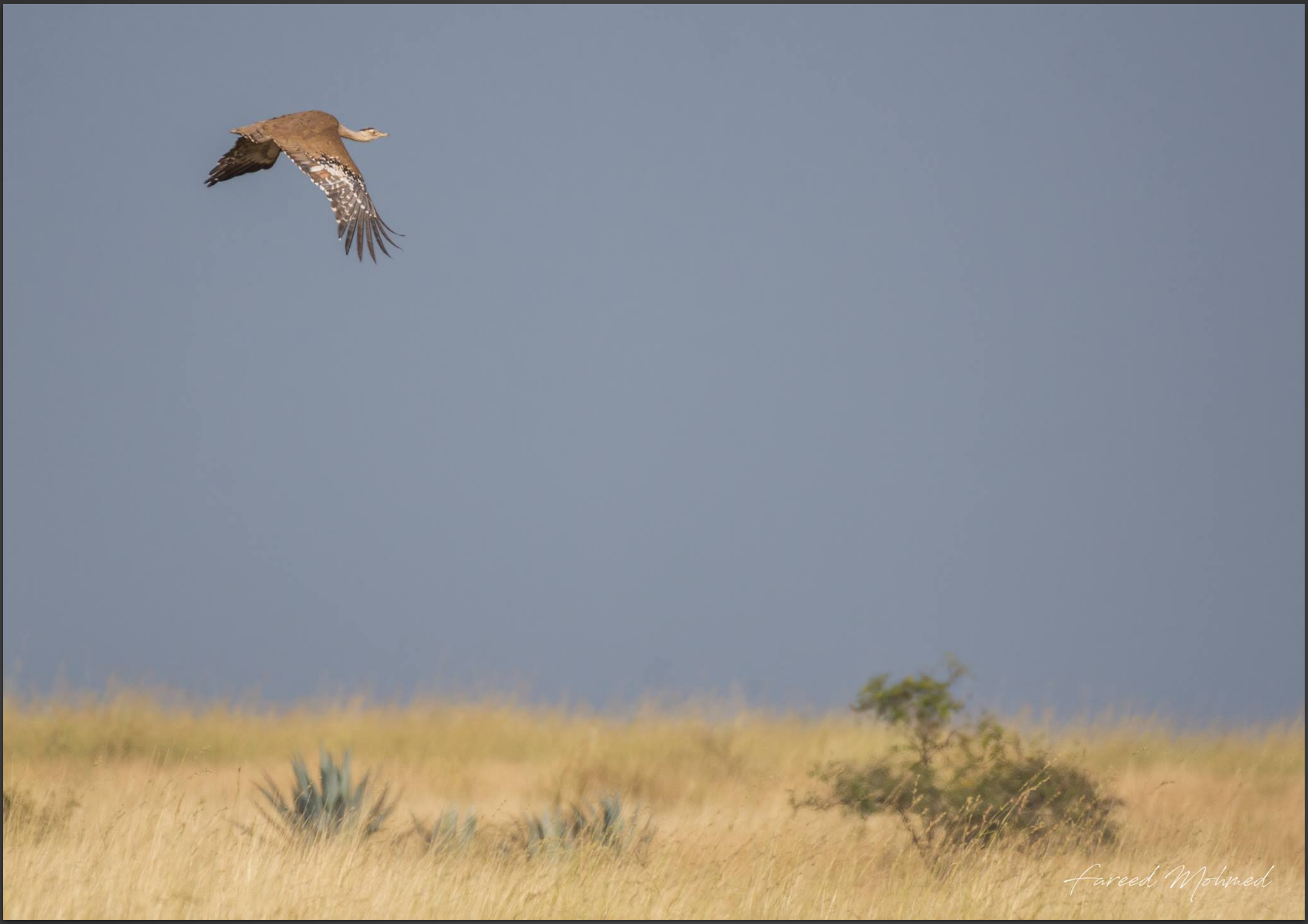
Photographer's Corner



© Phani Krishna Raavi

Chestnut Bellied Nuthatch
(Sitta cinnamoventris)
Sattal,Uttarakhand

Photographer’s Corner


Fareed Mohmed

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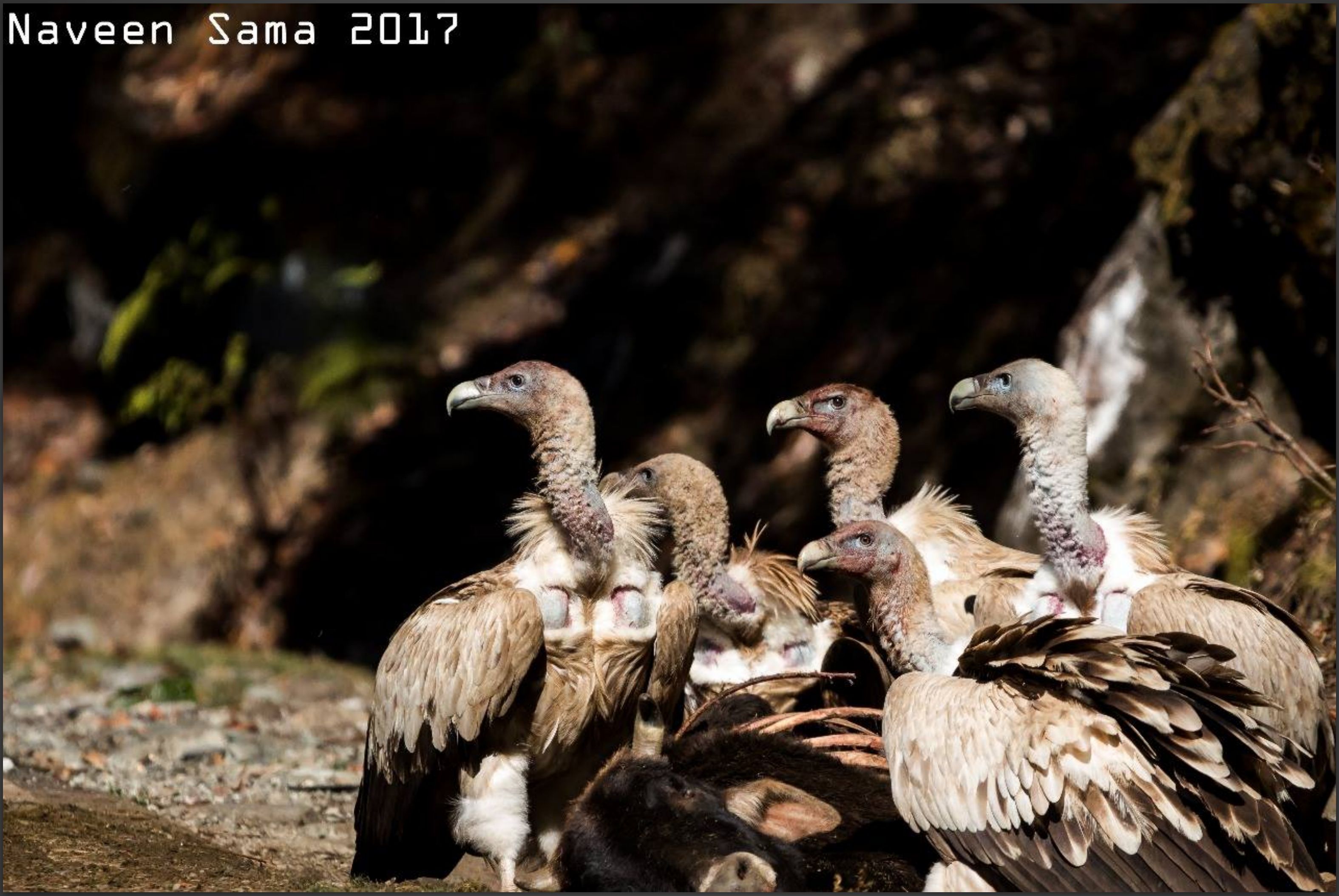
Great Indian Bustard *(Ardeotis nigriceps)*
Andhra Pradesh

Photographer’s Corner


Naveen Sama 2017

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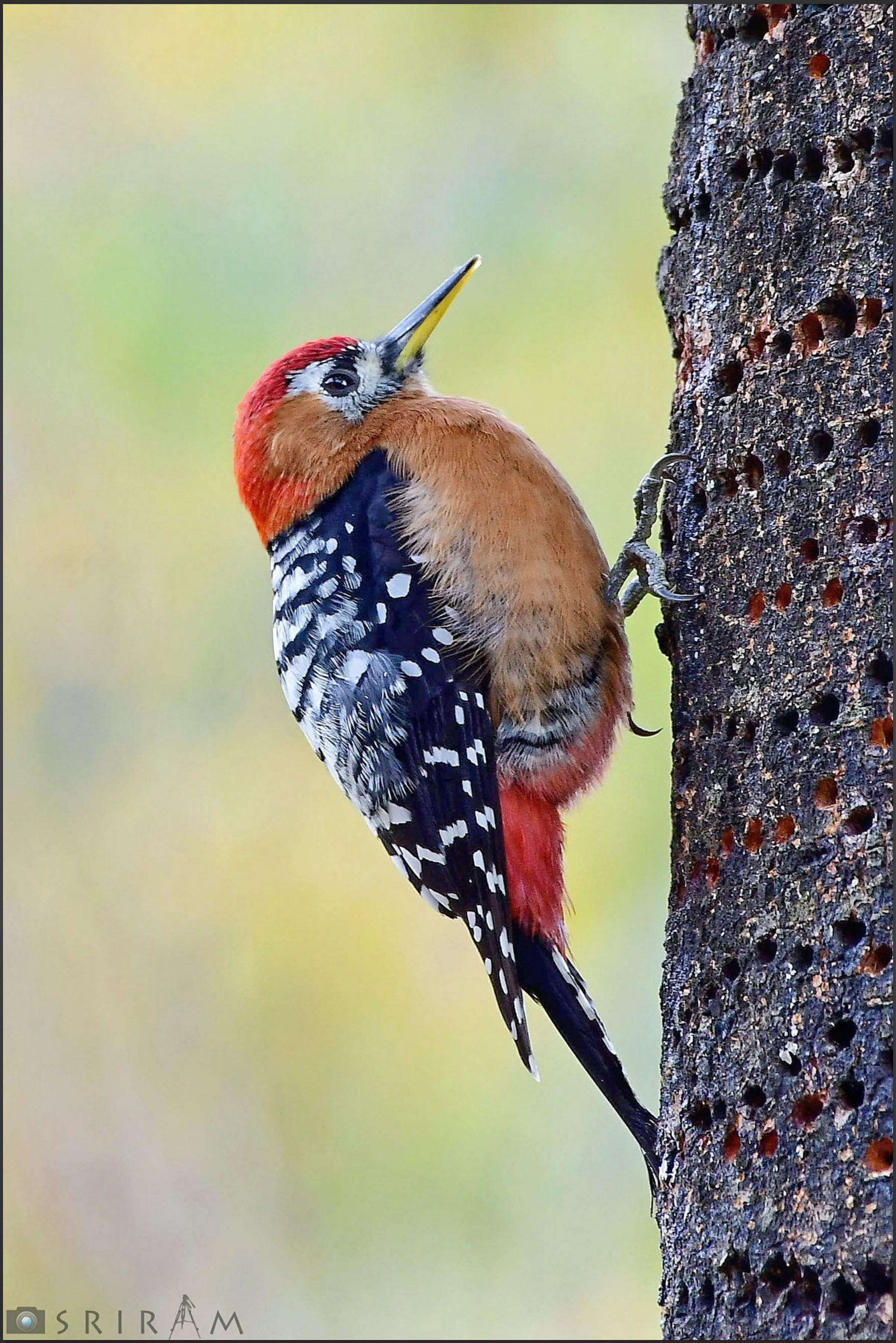
Himalayan Griffon Vulture
(Gyps himalayanensis))

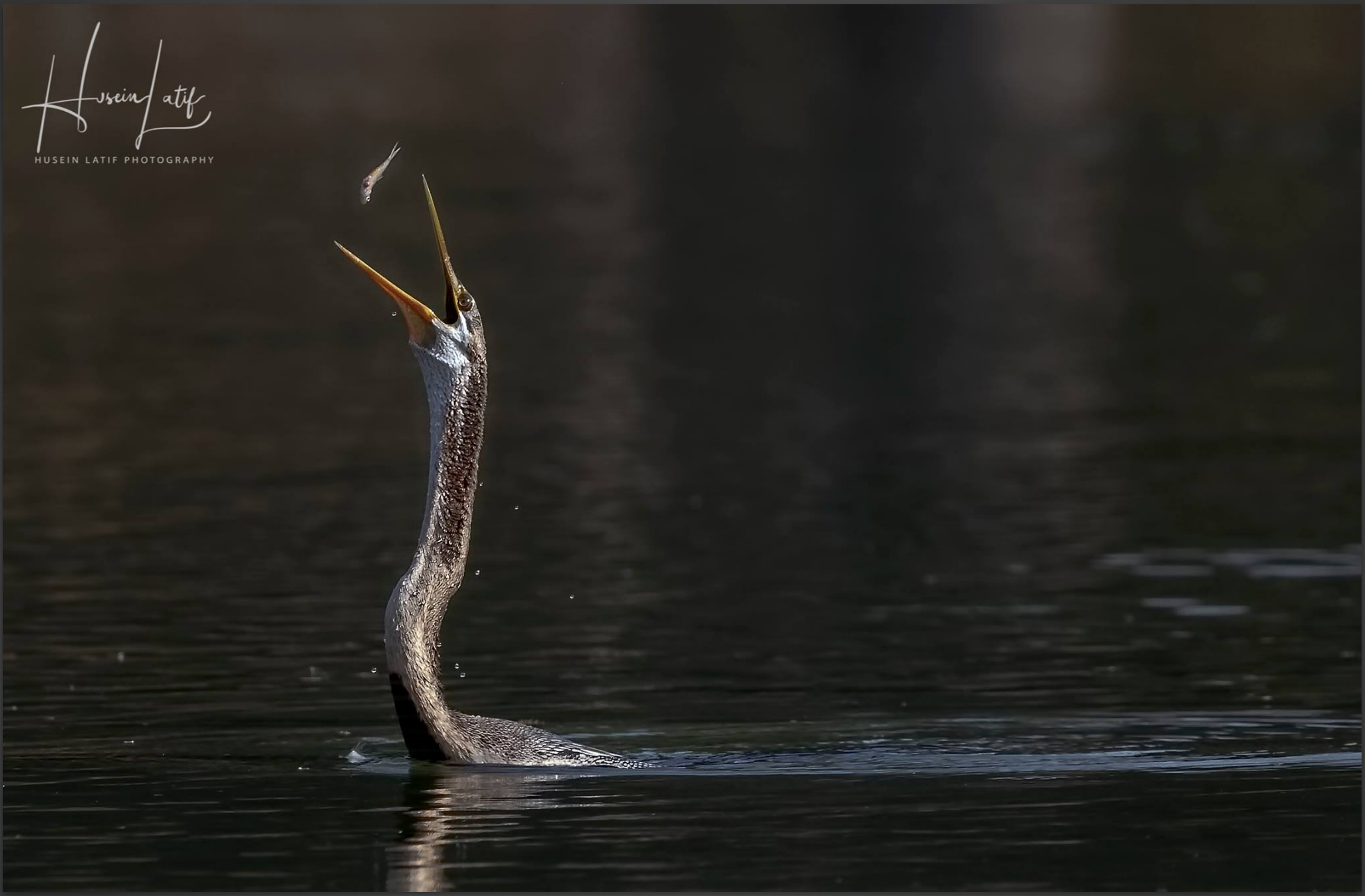
Photographer’s Corner



© Sriram Reddy

Rufous Bellied Woodpecker
(Dendrocopus hyperyathrus)
Mandal,Uttarakhand

Photographer’s Corner


Husein Latif
HUSEIN LATIF PHOTOGRAPHY

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Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogastor*)
Bharatpur,Rajasthan

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Hyderabad Birding Pals